

THE CASE FOR SOCIALISM

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE A B C OF SOCIALISM - - -	11
II.	SOCIALISM AND CONFISCATION. - -	19
III.	SOCIALISM AND PERSONAL PROPERTY - -	33
IV.	SOCIALISM AND LIBERTY - - -	46
V.	SOCIALISM AND OFFICIALISM - - -	60
VI.	SOCIALISM AND UNEMPLOYMENT - -	79
VII.	SOCIALISM AND WASTE - - -	91
VIII.	SOCIALISM AND LEVELLING DOWN -	107
IX.	SOCIALISM AND HUMAN NATURE - -	120
X.	ON BEING PRACTICAL - - -	135

The Case for Socialism.

CHAPTER I.

THE A B C OF SOCIALISM

NOBODY can exercise the rights of citizenship intelligently nowadays without clearly understanding the case for Socialism. At parliamentary and municipal elections, in every department of public affairs, the issues are defined, with constantly increasing insistence, in terms of Socialism and Anti-Socialism ; not only in the direct proposals put forward by Socialists themselves, but in the implications of the Socialist idea in the proposals of all political parties. And no vote can be an intelligent vote unless there is behind it a knowledge of the Socialist case and a reasoned judgment upon the Socialist idea.

The Socialist movement has passed beyond that ordeal stage which every new movement has to encounter, the stage of mere unreasoning prejudice and the unstudied use of epithets against it. Within the life of a single generation it has drawn to its ranks millions of earnest thinking men and women ; and it has made out its case so convincingly that in every civilised country its capture of the power of government is now the dominant issue in political conflict. It is sweeping on from strength to strength ; challenging the old order everywhere with confident boldness. Here in Great Britain its hands are already on the reins of government ; and there is manifest in the utterances of its opponents a bewildered sense of the futility of their efforts to stay its march to power. It claims to explain to the common man why poverty and squalor exist in a world of

abundant resources ; and the common man is everywhere finding in it the hope of fulfilment for his dream of human life set free from these miseries. In these circumstances, every citizen who wishes to keep intelligently abreast of the responsibilities of his citizenship must study the Socialist case ; and the desire amongst reasonable people for a serious study and understanding of it is now everywhere manifest. It is to meet this desire, to provide a statement of the essential teaching of Socialism, that this book is written.

In the first place, we Socialists believe that poverty can be prevented. The fact we ask you to begin by bearing in mind is that people are not poor in Great Britain because Great Britain is a poor country. We believe that the civilized world is able to produce enough wealth to give a high standard of life to all its people, if only that wealth could be got into the lives of its people.

Our first point, therefore, is that poverty is not inevitable ; that the resources of the world are sufficient to prevent it ; and that it could be prevented if only the nation saw clearly what it is that stops the wealth of the country from getting into the homes of the people and being available for the general life.

That may seem like a commonplace to you. But if you will think about it for a moment, you will see that it establishes a very real difference between Socialism and all other political ideas.

All other parties take the fact of poverty for granted, as being part of the natural and inevitable order of human affairs.

It is true that both Liberals and Conservatives put forward schemes of social reform intended to get rid of the extremes of poverty ; such schemes as those for old-age pensions, for feeding necessitous school children, for ensuring workmen against unemployment, and the like. That is all good so far as it goes ; but it does not touch the actual problem of the cause of poverty. On the contrary, it assumes that there will continue to be poverty to be relieved in these ways. These reforms are only proposals for giving

relief ; and amount to no more than constantly baling out the boat while the leak which causes all the trouble is left untouched. The problem of poverty can only be effectively dealt with at its source—by stopping the leak.

What both Liberals and Conservatives take for granted is the broad fact of a rich class and a poor class continuing to exist ; a population on the one hand living at ease with all the comforts of a spacious life, and a working population on the other hand living in small houses, with little leisure, and with incomes only at or about the margin of subsistence.

No political party other than the Socialist party has any idea of fundamentally altering that state of things. They are quite willing to give us reforms within the existing social order ; and would be glad to see the poor class assured of regular work and wages good enough to go a little beyond the bare margin of subsistence ; so that, for instance, working men might live in suburban streets of artisans' houses instead of in slums, have a little back garden to cultivate, work eight hours a day instead of ten or twelve, and even get a week or a fortnight for holiday in the summer.* But the broad fact of a rich class and a poor class would remain ; a small rich class with spacious lives and a large poor class with comparatively little. The notion of the other political parties is that practical politics are limited to such reforms as simply mitigate the extremes of poverty ; the Socialist idea is that the national resources should be made available for the general national life, and that this class division, being in itself an evil and unjust thing, should cease.

When therefore, we Socialists say that poverty can be prevented, you will see that we mean by "poverty"

* In precisely the same way, while serfdom existed there were all sorts of proposals put forward by humane people for relaxing the conditions of serfdom, making it less intolerable for the serf, while still retaining the institution of serfdom as part of the social order. What was wrong, of course, was not that the conditions of serfdom were too harsh and required to be modified, but that the institution of serfdom itself was unjust, and required to be abolished. The position with regard to private capitalism is precisely the same in relation to all this proposed reform within the existing order.

something very different from utter destitution. Poverty is not an absolute term. It is a relative term ; relative to the kind of life which the actual resources of the world might make possible for men.

A man is a poor man if he is shut out from any of the possibilities of human life within the range of the general existing resources of the world.

He may have his animal wants supplied ; may have a sufficiency of food, of clothing, and of shelter. His master's cattle have that, according to their cattle standard. But that is not human life. If the resources of the world are ample—as they are ample—to provide for all men leisure and a high standard of the graces of life as well as of its animal satisfactions, he is a poor man so long as he is shut out from the full enjoyment of those graces. We Socialists refuse to accept as an adequate standard of life any standard which stops short of full human life. The habit of setting up separate class standards as to what is an adequate kind of life is so engrained in the minds of men to-day that it is the commonest thing to hear rich men denouncing as extravagant and unreasonable any claim by working men to many things which the employer class would find an intolerable deprivation in having to go without themselves. We Socialists present our challenge straight in the face of that class idea. We say that a man is a man, and that we will have no class standards in these things.

We set up a human standard. And whatever kind of life the general resources of the world can make possible for all men has to go into that standard ; and as the powers of men over Nature increase, and their wealth producing activities become more and more fruitful by reason of growing knowledge and invention, that increase has got to go into the general standard, raising the general level of life, leaving no class out of the general advance.

To be below that standard is to be poor. To reserve for the enjoyment of a class alone any of these things which might be the common human heritage is evidence of injustice in our social organisation. And if the whole of the proposals of the orthodox political parties for “ social reform ” within the existing order were carried out to-

morrow, this fundamental injustice of class division and class privilege would still remain.

We should still not have a human society ; but a class society of the rich and an underworld of the poor.

You see, therefore, something of what we Socialists mean when we say that our aim is to make the national resources available for the general life of the nation.

The question is : How can it be done ?

And you cannot answer that question until you first see clearly what it is that now prevents the resources of the nation from getting into the life of the nation. To that point, therefore, our enquiry must in the first place be carefully directed.

The wealth upon which the world lives is produced by labour, skill, and thought, working upon land and capital.

Now, look at the two classes into which society is broadly divided, and you will see that they get their shares of that wealth in different ways.

The class which gives the labour, skill, and thought, lives upon wages.

The class which owns the land and capital lives upon rent, interest, and profit.

*In both cases the livelihood comes out of the current daily wealth production of the world.**

And broadly speaking, the method of getting one's living by wages represents the bare life, and the people who get their living in that way are the poor class ; while the method of getting one's living by rent, interest, and profit represents the full life, and the people who get their living in that way are the rich class.

There are exceptions, of course. There are people living poorly upon rents and dividends, and highly skilled experts living well upon wages. There is a certain mixture of classes. You do not have a mass of poor people living on wages, then a gap, and on the other side of the gap a

* Note this very carefully ; you will see its importance as the argument develops.

mass of rich people living upon rent and dividends. From abject poverty to great wealth there is every sort of gradation in between. Some small owners supplement their little rents or dividends by earning wages, and some wage-earners save a little and draw dividends on a small scale. But, broadly speaking, the generalization is true that the distinctive way of living of the poor class is by wages, and the distinctive way of living of the rich class is by ownership.

The purpose of our enquiry, therefore, is to discover how it is that the resources of the nation, daily produced by the activities of the nation, should be distributed in this way. Why is it that ownership should mean one way of life and industry another way of life ; the one spacious, the other poor ?

And here a brief digression is necessary in order to make every step in the argument perfectly clear as we go along ; a digression of which the reader will find the germ in the footnote to the previous paragraph calling upon him to note specially the fact that “ in both cases the livelihood comes out of the current daily wealth production of the world.”

The facts as to this must be made as clear as possible.

The problem into which we are enquiring is not a problem of one class possessing resources and the other not. It is a problem of the distribution day by day of the resources *which are being produced day by day by the industry of the world.*

It is upon this point that most confusion exists in the minds of those who do not think clearly on these matters. They imagine the rich man possessing wealth and living upon that wealth, inheriting it from his father, paying wages out of it to the people he employs, and so on. Nothing of the sort. *The whole nation, rich and poor, lives upon the current daily wealth production of the world.*

The rich man owns land. But he does not live on land. He lives on wealth produced out of the land by industry. He owns capital. But he does not live on capital. He lives

on wealth produced day by day by industry applied to his capital. The whole worth of his land and capital as a means of income to him is in the industry attached to that land and capital, and in the constant production of that industry. He does not pay wages to anyone. The industry produces its own wages as well as his income. If any workman doubts that, let him ask himself whether he would be allowed to stop ten minutes in the factory if he did *not* produce his own wages and something over.

The rich man does not inherit the wealth upon which he lives. He cannot live upon any form of wealth other than the wealth which is being produced round about him day by day. What he inherits is *power over the sources of that wealth*. Land is the primary source of all wealth. Labour applied to land makes it fruitful; and it is upon that perishable and constantly renewed fruitfulness that the world lives. It is fruitful, not in food only, but in its minerals, its timber, its products out of which invention and labour shape the implements of the more complicated wealth production of modern life. As civilization advances, the production of these implements becomes greater and greater, representing vast powers of creating wealth when human energy and human ingenuity works with and upon them.

It is power over these sources of production, land and capital, which the rich man inherits; and the value of that inheritance is that it is a means of making the immediate perishable wealth upon which the world lives flow into his life as fast as it is produced.

You will thus see that, when you speak about the distribution of our national wealth, it is necessary to guard very carefully against the common error of picturing to yourself that wealth as a sort of fixed and permanent thing. When, for example, people repeat the familiar idiotcy which some of the more stupid amongst them imagine to be an argument against Socialism, that if you divided up all the wealth of the country to-day there would be inequalities again to-morrow, the simple-minded error into which they fall is that of supposing the wealth of the country to be a fixed and permanent thing, which you could get

together into a heap and divide up. You could, of course, do nothing of the kind, even if anybody were silly enough to suggest it.

The problem of the distribution of wealth is not the problem of an act of distribution, but of a continuous process of distribution. The wealth of the country is a constantly produced, constantly distributed, constantly consumed stream of commodities ; and the problem of its distribution is not a problem of its division at any given moment, but a problem *of having proper channels for its constant and regular flow into the life of the nation.*

I have put this point at some length because a thorough grasp of it is of fundamental importance. Confusion of mind about it means confused and fallacious thinking on the whole economic problem. Clearly see this true nature of the wealth on which the world lives—how it is in constant production and constant consumption, how it is created and used and done with day by day—and the problem of its distribution at once presents itself to you in a clearer light. The error into which people fall is that of supposing that the rich class actually possess great wealth, and that the Socialists wish to take it from them and give it to the mass of the people. Whereas, I repeat again, the fact is that what the rich possess is power to divert from the mass of the people the flow of the wealth which the labour of the mass of the people constantly produces ; so that wealth which does not now exist at all, wealth which will be created to-morrow, next week, next year, counts as their possession, and will flow into their lives steadily and constantly as fast as it is produced.

It is this process of distribution which is the important thing.

The rich class possess wealth which is now passing through the national life ; but that is only incidental to their power over the sources of wealth and over the process of its production and distribution. The real nature of their class privilege is that they possess the power of appropriating wealth which is or will be created at any time, now, hereafter, and to all time if the existing system continues.

And so we get back to the question on which this digression arose : What is it that prevents the resources of the nation from getting into the life of the nation ? How is it that this constantly flowing stream of wealth, flowing from the daily activities of the nation, how is it that, instead of irrigating the whole life of the nation, it runs in such a way as to make a few lives grow rank with excessive luxury, and leaves myriads of other lives bleak and dry ?

Is not the answer to that question already becoming clear to you ? Hark back for a moment to what we saw is the fundamental distinction between the two classes, and the different ways in which they get their living. The distinctive way of living of the poor class is by wages ; the distinctive way of living of the rich is by rent, interest, and profits. Evidently the difference between incomes derived from wages and incomes derived from rent, interest, and profits, gives us the clue to be followed up in this enquiry as to what it is that prevents the resources of the nation from getting into the general life of the nation.

The best way of following up that clue is to take an actual case of wealth production under normal capitalist conditions, and see what happens.

Here, for instance, is a boot factory where a thousand men (they are largely women and boys, to be strictly accurate) are engaged in producing boots and shoes. By the end of the week, labour, operating upon capital in the form of raw material and machinery, has created new wealth in the form of finished boots and shoes.

The value of the finished boots and shoes includes the value of the raw material and the industry of a vast army of people engaged in preparing that material, from the cattle-tender to the tanner, before it comes into the hands of the shoe operative at all ; beside the industry and skill of those who, from inventor to miner, have placed at the disposal of the operative the machinery with which he works. But the shoe operative by transforming this raw material into the finished article, has created a new value and brought new wealth into existence, value and wealth which is his human energy embodied in the boots and shoes.

How is that new wealth distributed ?

The whole of it belongs to the man who owns the factory.

At the end of the week, having come into possession of this newly created wealth, the owner pays a portion of its value back to the operative in the form of wages.

What is it that regulates the amount so paid back as wages ?

Just in the same way as oil and fuel have to be supplied to the inanimate machinery to keep it in a state of working efficiency, so the workman, the human machinery, has to be supplied with food and clothes and shelter to keep him in efficient working order. The owner of the factory buys labour as cheaply as he can. Wages represent the cost of keeping labour alive and working,—the cost of running the human machinery of the factory.

Now compare this with the position of the slave under a slave-owner. When the slave-owner bought a man, he bought labour. The value of the slave to his owner was the slave's capacity for labour. All that the slave produced belonged to his owner. The cost of the slave's keep had to come out of it ; and the owner lived upon the surplus.

So far as the distribution of wealth between the slave-owner and the slave is concerned, is it not analogous to the distribution of wealth between ownership and industry under capitalism ?

The slave-owner had to make three payments—the payment of a lump sum down for the slave, the payment for land and tools and equipment for the slave to work with, and after that the constant daily payment of the cost of the slave's maintenance.

The capitalist has this advantage over the slave-owner, that he escapes the first of these payments. He gets his labour for nothing, and calls that process " providing men with employment," claiming to be a benefactor to the community by doing so. All they produce belongs to him, in exactly the same way that all the slave produced belonged to the slave-owner. The cost of their keep has to come out of it in the form of wages and the owner takes the surplus.

That is the process by which the constantly produced wealth of the country is distributed between wages on the one hand, and rent, interest, and profit on the other. We Socialists can see no essential difference between this system, which we call "wage slavery" and the old system of chattel slavery. There are superficial and non-essential differences in detail; but the two things are identical in the main fact that the slave-owner and the capitalist both live in exactly the same way—upon the surplus wealth remaining after paying the cost of maintenance of the labour which produces that wealth.

The chief superficial difference between the two forms of slavery is that whereas the slave-owner owned both the man and the means of the man's work, the capitalist owns only the means of the man's work. Under this latter system the man is nominally free. But in its practical consequences there is little real difference between owning the man and owning the means of the man's work. The man is helpless without access to the means of his work. He must either sell himself into wage slavery to the owner of the means of his work, or starve. It comes to the same practical end in either case; whether you own the man or only own the means of his work, either form of ownership gives you power to take possession of everything the man produces, simply for the price of his keep out of it.

We come, therefore, to the fact of private ownership and control of the means of the nation's work, as the explanation of the present one-sided distribution of the national wealth; the reason why vast armies of people live in poverty in a land of plenty. The nation's industry is carried on for the profit of its proprietors, and society is organised for their exclusive benefit. The share which the workman gets is simply maintenance for himself and his family, necessary to keep wealth production going. It is not regarded by the employing class as being really part of the national distribution of wealth at all. The industry of the nation belongs to them; and they look upon the amount paid in wages simply as a charge upon their resources; a charge which they enter in their accounts as "cost of

labour ” ; so much taken off the profits ; an expense in the same category as the expense of machinery or fuel. The workman has no status, no right to work or to live, unless they find it profitable to employ him. He is an alien in the land, taking his place in organised society only by permission of an owner and on condition of being able to find a proprietor willing to buy him. What is spent upon his keep is, from the point of view of his proprietor, merely one of the expenses of business to be set against the profit got out of his labour ; like the cost of feeding cattle set against the price of beef.

We can now see pretty clearly how it is that the constantly produced stream of national wealth is distributed ; and why it is that the distinctive fact about poverty is that men live by wages, while the distinctive fact about the spacious kind of life is that men live by ownership. The private ownership of land and capital stands revealed as simply a device for enabling a small class to live by imposing their maintenance upon the industry of the community ; diverting into their possession, as fast as it is produced, the whole of the wealth created by the national industry over and above the necessary maintenance of the workers.

Ask yourself, frankly, is that way of living honest ?

We Socialists assert that there is no moral difference between this process of capitalist exploitation of the workers and ordinary pocket-picking or brigandage. To us, the gentleman class which lives in this way is merely a class of “ disgraceful sponging creatures.” I put this general consideration of the ethics of the question to you,—that in a world in which no human need is served without human industry, there must be a process of dishonesty hidden somewhere in the social and industrial arrangements which send the flow of the world’s wealth into non-productive lives. Call it what fine names you please—rent or interest or return on capital or unearned increment—the fact remains that in its essential character it is theft, tribute levied by an idle class upon industry.

"Oh, but," you say, "it is legal. After all, the land and capital belong to these people; and surely they have a right to their income from it."

To which I reply that it is this private ownership of land and capital which we Socialists indict as the root cause of poverty. We challenge its justice and its right to exist or continue. We trace directly to it the ruin, the widespread misery and destitution, of the mass of the people.

In the first place, we point out to you that the proprietor class get their capital in exactly the same way as they get their income,—out of the surplus produced by industry over and above the cost of maintaining those engaged in the industry. Capital is no more a fixed and permanent thing than is the currently consumed wealth on which the world lives. Like that wealth, capital is constantly being used up and constantly being renewed by fresh production. I have before me as I write the half-yearly statement of accounts and balance sheet of one of our great railway companies. I find in it, as I find in it every half-year, a heavy item of expense set down for depreciation and renewals. What does that mean? It means that during the half-year a certain proportion of the capital of the company has been used up, worn out of existence; and that it is being renewed and replaced out of the half-year's revenue. And that happens every half-year. Within a sufficient period of years, a comparatively short period, practically the whole of the capital of the company is worn up and wiped out of existence, and replaced out of revenue in this way. And so it is with every business undertaking. It provides its own capital as it goes along. The capital upon which labour is now operating in my neighbour's boot factory is capital provided by labour, capital provided out of the revenue of the business as the business has grown and developed. That is what is meant by "a developing business"; a business whose capital is obtained out of revenue, not only for replacing that which is constantly wearing out—the business would become bankrupt if it did not do that—but also for extending and enlarging it. The whole thing comes out of labour, the capital as well as the profits.

As for landownership,—well, it is hardly necessary nowadays to be a Socialist to see what most Liberals and many orthodox politicians admit, that there is, and there can be, no moral or just title whatever to the private *ownership of land*.

Land is the primary need of the human race. It is the essential thing; the storehouse from which, in the first instance, we draw all our resources. Human life depends absolutely upon it, as absolutely as upon the air we breathe. The land of the country is the nation's birthright and means of existence, upon the use and occupation of which all our activities depend, and without which life itself is impossible.

To have private persons in the position of being able to demand toll and tribute for the use of the earth, the natural creation, is against public policy. It is a violation of the common right of the human race. It is the enslavement of the nation.

It is legal, no doubt. But so was slavery. So was serfdom. Its legality simply comes down to us from the time when our institutions were whatever the lords and masters of the world were able, by force or fraud, to set up for their own advantage. It belongs to the category of the many devices by which servitude has been fastened upon the peoples of the earth. Trace the title to land back, and always the original title is the title of force, of the sword, of the armed robber powerful enough to establish his lordship over other men or cunning enough to alienate the patrimony of his clan to himself. No moral validity whatever attaches to this device of placing the people under permanent tribute to the robber class for ever and ever by giving legal sanction (legal sanction in this matter meaning the sanction of the robbers themselves, who controlled law making) to private ownership of the thing essential to life.

That is the meaning of private landownership. When you say that a man owns land, you are simply describing a state of things by which one man possesses the power of taxing for his own benefit all the life and industry over a given area; making the whole population pay him tribute for the right to live in their native land. You might just as

well have air-ownership ; rent-charges for the right to breathe. That would be in no way more ridiculous than the claim to private landownership. The whole thing is merely a device for imposing the maintenance of an idle class upon the labour of the countryside, compelling the people who live and work upon the land to maintain a powerful group of brigands ; and is happily ceasing to be regarded as respectable even amongst orthodox politicians.

The position occupied by the landowning and industry-owning class can be best illustrated by a comparison. Up till a little over a hundred years ago we had in England what was known as " the sinecure system." It was a beautiful arrangement of Providence for providing incomes for the younger sons and poor relations of the governing classes. Nearly every post in the public service of this country was filled by the appointment of a " Place holder." He was appointed under Letters Patent by the Crown at an adequate salary, with leave to appoint a deputy. The word " Placeholder " conveys to us to-day nothing of its old official meaning. When we speak of a placeholder to-day, we simply mean a man who holds an office of some sort or other ; though a sufficient reminiscence of its earlier meaning still clings to the word to give it, so far as it is now used at all, an implication of easy office. But under the old system it did not mean a man who held an office in any responsible sense at all. It merely meant a man who owned an estate in the emoluments of an office with the work of which he had nothing to do. The estate in the office and the actual work in the office were as separate and distinct as an estate in land and actual work on the land are separate and distinct to-day. The estate in the office was simply a means of drawing emoluments from the work of the office, exactly as an estate in land is a means of drawing tribute from industry on the land. The whole system of Patent Placeholding was a device for quartering favoured people on the public purse. The younger son or the poor relation of this or that governing family was given the Place. His Letters Patent were his title deeds. Not infrequently the Place was inherited, like any landed estate.

The person holding it appointed a deputy at a small remuneration, and lived on the rest of the income of his Place and its emoluments, without having any duties whatever to perform. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, practically the whole public service of this country was estated in this way to "Patent Placeholders"; and the nation had the honour of maintaining by this device the otherwise unprovided-for members of the governing classes.

For example, George Selwyn, famous as a wit and a man about town, was a Placeholder. He was "Clerk of the Irons and Surveyor of the Melting Houses in the Tower of London." "Paymaster of the works concerning the repairs and well-keeping of His Majesty's Houses," "Surveyor General of Crown Lands," "Clerk of the Crown and Peace, and Registrar of the Court of Chancery in the Island of Barbadoes"—it was the Court, says his biographer with sly humour, "it was the Court which was in the Barbadoes, and not the Registrar"—and so on. These Places were, of course, absolute sinecures. The Placeholder simply drew an income from them; and the whole civil service, by being allocated in estates in this way, was made a means of providing a settlement in life for an army of idle and irresponsible persons; exactly as the land is now.

In 1782 Burke abolished most of these sinecures. And exactly the same cry about "confiscation and robbery" and "depriving people of their property," which is now raised by landowners and capitalists against Socialism, was raised by the Patent Placeholders. Horace Walpole, himself a Placeholder several times over, wrote very bitterly about it.

"He who holds an ancient Patent Place," he said, "enjoys it as much by law as any gentleman holds his estate; and from the same fountain, by grants from the Crown, as I possess my Places."

And Horace Walpole was perfectly right. There is no difference whatever between landownership and the old system of Patent Placeholding. They are both nothing

more or less than devices for imposing the maintenance of a parasite class upon the resources of the nation.*

Socialism puts it to you that the settlement of this problem of poverty can only be brought about by getting rid of the Placeholders who are bleeding the life of the country white by the tribute-levying system of private ownership of the land and capital of the country. The nation, if it desires its resources to get into the homes and lives of its people, must own its own land and capital, and so control the sources of the wealth upon which it lives ; must organise its own industry, and carry on the production of the national wealth for use in the general national life.

That is Socialism : Community ownership of the land and of the means of producing and distributing wealth ; and the organisation of industry under that common ownership as public service for the benefit of all ; directed to social ends and the equipment of the life of the whole people instead of, as now, to the private enrichment of a privileged class of owners.

That is what Socialists are working for. The Socialist party cannot do it, and does not pretend to be able to do it. The nation must do it. Socialism is not something that the Socialists say they are going to do for you. It is a principle of national life and organisation, which the nation must adopt or reject for itself. Our mission in politics is to convince you of the justice of this principle. We believe that in this proposal lies the hope of the world, the possibility of a real human society in which citizenship shall be—as citizenship in a civilized community should be—the guarantee given by the collective life of the nation of full opportunity to every man and woman.

The enslavement of men by their fellow men has taken many forms in human history. Whatever its form may

* It is worth noting, in passing, as an illustration of how history repeats itself, that one of the arguments used on behalf of the Placeholders was that by their expenditure they provided a great deal of employment for the poor ; and that the abolition of these Patent Places would therefore be a very serious injury to the working-man !

be, the substance and reality of enslavement is that it gives one man the power to say to other men, " I shall live pleasantly on the good things of the world by making you provide them for me." Whatever the device may be which enables men to do that, is slavery, The fight against private ownership of land and capital, the fight for Socialism, for the nation's control of its own resources, is the last fight in the age-long struggle of humanity for freedom ; a struggle which can have but one end. And that end is the final disappearance from human society of the right of an owning class to live by tribute upon the labour of a subject class.

CHAPTER II.

SOCIALISM AND CONFISCATION.

DOMINANT in all the opposition to Socialism is the assertion that it is a policy of confiscation and robbery. The case against Socialism on this point has been well summed up by an English statesman of the last generation. "If you will give full compensation to the owners," he is reported to have said, "it would not be worth while doing it, for you would be paying away as much as you got; while if you do not give full compensation, it would be robbery."

In almost every great controversy you will find, if you trace men's differences far enough back, that those differences arise from their failure to see clearly some quite simple and primary fact upon which the whole controversy is based. So it is with this controversy about Socialism and confiscation. Underlying all the discussion about Socialism there are certain conceptions of the meaning of wealth and the nature of property. Socialism is an attack upon the institution of private ownership of land and capital; and the primary question which must be answered before Socialism can be either advocated or opposed intelligently is: What is the real nature of this institution of private ownership of land and capital?

Men get into the habit of taking for granted the morality of existing institutions without troubling to question or understand them; just as many good men for many generations took for granted the morality of slavery or of religious persecution.

The institution of private property in land and capital has been the foundation of organised society for so long that men's conceptions of honesty, of justice, of morality, have all become tuned to it. When they speak of justice and of honesty, they mean regard for the sacredness of this institution of private property in land and capital. All their ideas as to honesty in the relations between man and man are bound up with this system of private capitalism ; and it is, therefore, not to be wondered at that a political philosophy which directly attacks private capitalism, as Socialism does, should be regarded as subversive of honesty and morality.

That is the hard-shelled frame of mind which we have to break through, so as to get men to look an accepted institution fairly in the face, and endeavour to see clearly and without prejudice what that institution really is. For our Socialist reply to this accusation about confiscation and robbery is that the institution of private capitalism stands revealed, once men can be got to see clearly its real nature and the way in which it operates in Society, as itself a dishonest institution, a system of organised confiscation and plunder, the cause of poverty and of untold human suffering, the secret of the failure of modern civilization to make life tolerable for such large masses of people.

Let there be no mistake about it. Socialism, I repeat, is an attack upon the institution of private property in land and capital. We Socialists advocate the expropriation of the landed and capitalist class ; their deprivation of their present way of living ; and the organisation of the wealth-producing activities of the nation by the nation itself, by the whole people acting in civic co-operation, for the benefit of all the citizens and members of the nation.

I want you to be perfectly clear about this, and not to attempt to shirk the full consequences of the Socialist proposal. Do not, for example, let us deceive ourselves into thinking that we can get round this accusation about confiscation and robbery by talking about some form of compensation to the persons whom we propose to expropriate. If the nation gave them compensation, in the

sense of giving them an equivalent for what it is proposed to take from them, we should fail in our purpose. Compensation, if it is to be a real equivalent, would only continue in another form the very thing which it our purpose to end together. Definitely and clearly, our purpose is to deprive these people of their present way of living, and to make the wealth which now passes into their possession available for the national life. As a matter of expediency the nation may have to give some sort of temporary accommodation to displaced people during the period of transition. The change-over from private capitalism to the co-operative commonwealth is, however, in its very nature a process by which these private charges on the commonwealth are to be finally eliminated. If the change is to be brought about by reason and peaceful development in the ordinary course of political action, there will be a transition period—brief or prolonged, according to the understanding and clear purpose which the nation brings to bear upon its task—during which various adjustments and accommodations will be made. There are many possible devices for effecting this : for example, the issue of Government stock with interest diminishing to extinction over a period of years ; terminable annuities ; a purposeful use of such taxation as the death duties towards the end in view. But looking beyond that period of transition and of half-done things, we are definitely working to put an end to their appropriation of the national resources. In its final consummation, Socialism means the complete expropriation of the proprietary class ; and whatever form of compensation to individuals may be devised for easing society through the period of transition does not alter the fact that our proposal must be judged by the end it has in view ; and that end is the wiping out of exclusive private property in land and capital, and the substitution for it of the joint ownership of the whole people.

This it is which our opponents describe as confiscation and robbery ; but which we Socialists believe, for reasons which I now proceed to put for your consideration, to be putting an end to confiscation and robbery, to poverty and its attendant miseries.

Obviously, whether we or our opponents are in the right as to the morality of the Socialist proposal depends entirely upon what is the real character of those proprietary rights of which we propose to dispossess the class which now holds them. To the discovery of that real character we must, therefore, now turn our close attention. We shall, I think, find that it is surprisingly different from what the average opponent of Socialism loosely assumes it to be.

Let us take a definite case. Here, we will say, is a man possessed of a family fortune of £10,000, which passes on from one generation to another. Of course, in actual life fortunes do not generally remain fixed and stable in that way. They may be increased by shrewd investment, or reduced or lost altogether by prodigality or foolish investment. But such variations are only the accidents of the capitalist system; and to understand anything clearly, you must first of all strip away from it its accidental and get to its essential characteristics. And the essential thing about this institution of private capitalism is that by its means a man is enabled to hand down to a line of successors in perpetuity a way of living without working, having once attained to that position himself. Here, therefore, is our man with his fortune of £10,000. Let us, as carefully as we can, note its characteristics.

The first thing that you will notice about it is that, assuming the continued existence of the capitalist system, there is no reason why the inheriting generations should not stretch out in an unending line into the future. It is a reproduction of the miracle of the widow's cruse of oil. After three generations or thirty generations have lived upon this fortune of £10,000, it still remains intact as a fortune of £10,000 for the next generation; and there is no reason whatever, within the continued existence of the capitalist system, why it should not remain a fortune of £10,000 to all eternity, *notwithstanding the fact that somebody continues to live upon it all the time.* Obviously, there is some process going on here which we must understand a little more clearly before we can pass on to the next step in our enquiry. For it is not in nature that a thing which

is constantly being consumed should constantly remain undiminished. Evidently what these successive generations of men are living upon *is not their fortune of £10,000 at all, but some constantly-flowing stream of wealth coming into their lives day by day ; and the £10,000 is only a means of making that stream flow, and remains intact generation after generation to be used for that purpose.*

And here it is necessary again to note one important fact about the nature of the wealth upon which the world lives. As we have seen, this fortune of £10,000 remains intact, no matter how many generations may have lived upon it. But it is not in the nature of wealth to remain intact, even if nobody consumes it. All the wealth upon which men live is perishable. You cannot hand down the products of human labour from one generation to another. They begin to decay as soon as you have produced them. Some forms of wealth have a longer life than others, but they are all perishable in the end ; and in respect of the vastly more numerous and important forms of wealth it is a very rapid end. At no time is the great bulk of the wealth of the world more than a few months old. Wealth constantly disappears, and is being constantly replaced by fresh creation by human labour. No generation inherits its means of living from a former generation. It inherits knowledge, power, the intangible widening qualities of efficiency and life ; but so far as its tangible material sustenance is concerned, the human race lives from hand to mouth upon perishable things ; and a slackening of its energies for a single week in constantly reproducing the means of life would inflict grievous deprivation upon it. Suppose that all fresh creation or importation of wealth were to stop in England to-morrow. How much wealth would there be left in the country in a month's time, in six months, in a year ? I do not mean by reason of its consumption. Suppose that nobody consumed it. Suppose that the whole population emigrated, leaving the existing material wealth of the country behind. Within a week much of the food supply would have decayed out of existence. There would be a pretty bad smell everywhere ;

that is what a large part of the wealth of the country would *already have resolved itself into*. An explorer coming back in six months' time would find decay and ruin making their mark on the more lasting forms of wealth. Buildings would begin to show signs of neglect. Engines would be rusty and unsafe. Railway tracks would be getting into a shocking state. Cultivated lands would be returning to wilderness. Leave this process of decay to go on for a few years, and all wealth would practically perish. A few of the most durable products of human labour would remain like old rings or coins or bits of masonry found under the dust and rubbish of decay ; but for all the practical purposes of human life the wealth which the departing nation left behind would have ceased to exist.

Now, bearing all this in mind, let us return to our man with his £10,000. We have now carried our enquiry far enough to note two very curious facts in respect of which the property he possesses stands, as it were, outside the ordinary natural processes which affect all material things. In the first place, it has somehow been transmuted into a form in which it does not decay ; and in the second and most miraculous place, it can apparently be lived upon without being consumed. The first of these happenings can be easily explained ; but the two together present this thing called " property " to us in a very mysterious aspect indeed. As for a man's possessions not decaying, human ingenuity has got round that by the invention of money and of the credit system. If a man produces more wealth than he desires to consume at the moment, he can pass the surplus on into the current consumption of the world, and receive in return, in the form of money or credit, a token of the world's indebtedness to him for an equivalent at some future time when he chooses to call for it. In that way he can make his savings defy natural decay, and justly enjoy in the future that which he abstains from consuming to-day ; within such reasonable limitations of time as the law even now sets for the recovery of debt. But the point to be noted is that, whether he consumes it to-day or saves it in this form for future consumption, the final act of

consumption, whenever it takes place, ends the transaction and clears off the world's indebtedness to him.

But in the case of our man with his fortune of £10,000, some mysterious process is going on which enables his property to defy not only natural decay, but constant consumption also. There is no end to it. The indebtedness of the world to him is constantly being paid off, and yet constantly remains.

Clearly, we are here face to face with a much more complicated process than the saving and handing down of wealth in the natural meaning of saving and handing down. And, since miracles do not happen, we must look very closely into the facts, and see if we cannot discover what the real nature of this process is.

Let us, by way of getting quite close up to the facts, look at the daily life of the inheritor of this mysterious fortune, and see if we can find there any light upon this problem. And here we come at once upon plain natural facts. We come expecting to see a miracle in operation ; a man living upon wealth inherited from a former generation, living upon that wealth without reducing it, eating his cake and yet still having it, in defiance of all known natural laws affecting the durability of material things. . . . And of course, there is no such miracle at all. Here is no evidence whatever of wealth saved from former years and preserved in a magical form which can be used without being used up. On the contrary, the man is living, like the rest of us, in a perfectly natural way upon the perishable wealth produced daily by the contemporary labour of his own generation. He is living upon the bread which the agricultural labourer harvested last autumn and the baker made yesterday. The clothes he wears, the bed he sleeps in, and indeed all the things he consumes and enjoys, are all in the ordinary current course of the contemporary production of wealth of the ordinary perishable sort. He is not living upon inherited wealth, but upon wealth which is being produced round about him day by day. *Nor is he paying for that wealth out of his inherited savings ; because, if he were, his resources would in due time become exhausted.* Whereas they do not become exhausted, but are there at the end of

his life ready to be handed on undiminished to the next man.

We have now carried our enquiry far enough to enable us to see one thing quite plainly. It is clear that what this man possesses, and what he inherits from his fathers, is not actual wealth at all, *but a power of drawing upon the wealth of the world as that wealth is produced from day to day.*

"The widow," says Carlyle, "the widow is gathering nettles for her children's supper. A perfumed landlord, lounging delicately in Paris, has an alchemy by which he will extract from her every third nettle, and call it Rent and Law."

That is private capitalism—this power of appropriating the third nettle, the third tap of every shoemaker's hammer ; of placing under tribute the carpenter's saw, the labourer's work in the fields, and all the activities by which the world is supplied with its needs.

And so we get at last to close grips with the decisive question : How is this power exercised ? What is the alchemy, the process by which this constant tribute is extracted from the industry of the world ?

It is not necessary to repeat here the exposition of this point in the preceding chapter, but only briefly to summarize it.

The power of this man's £10,000 to bring day by day a constant stream of wealth into his life, flowing from the current activities of the world, is exercised by ownership and control of land and capital, power over the sources and the means of producing wealth. If the human race is to be maintained at all, man must have access to the land and to the means of production, and exercise his labour upon them. Labour, with that access, and with the developed machinery of production, can create far more wealth than is needed for the actual maintenance of the labourers. That being so, can you not see at a glance what is bound to happen if by some device you can make that right of access for one man dependent upon the permission of another man ? Does it not begin to be clear to you that if labour can be maintained for less than labour can produce,

SOCIALISM AND CONFISCATION

you have only to secure ownership of the means of production, and you have at once a device for getting possession of everything labour can produce over and above the cost of labour's maintenance ?

Labour, be it always remembered, must exercise itself or starve, and cannot exercise itself without access to land and tools. If you can put yourself into control of the land and the capital of the country, you can say to labour that you will only permit it to come in upon your conditions. You cannot make those conditions lower than a bare maintenance. You may even, by reason of combinations and revolts amongst the workers, have to go a little beyond bare maintenance. But that does not alter the broad fact that *you can compel labour to accept a good deal less than it produces, and to hand over the surplus to you.*

Capitalist society is built up entirely upon that surplus and its constant extraction from labour.

And, now, I think, we begin to see pretty clearly what these private proprietary rights are of which Socialists propose to dispossess the capitalist and the landlord. If a man saves out of his earnings or his industry, he has a just right to his savings. The reward of his saving is that by not consuming all he produces to-day he can command a corresponding amount of leisure to-morrow or at some future time. But if, instead of enjoying his savings in that natural way, he is permitted to use his savings so as to acquire ownership over the means by which other men must live, then he ceases to live upon his savings and begins to live by levying tribute. His savings, transformed into a power of control over the nation's industry, at once become the widow's cruse of oil, inexhaustible, enabling him to levy this tribute, to extract this surplus from labour for the maintenance of himself and his descendants to all time.

That is the economic process which we call private capitalism ; the process by which, once private ownership and control is permitted over land and the organisation of industry, the proprietor class are enabled to pocket the difference between what labour can produce and what labour can live upon, calling it the rent of their lands or the

return on their capital ; the obvious fact being that it is simply loot taken from labour rendered economically helpless to resist. It is private ownership and control of land and capital that is confiscation and robbery, daily and continuous confiscation, enabling the proprietor class to quarter themselves in perpetuity upon the labour of the nation, to live by levying tribute, by stripping industry of wealth as fast as industry produces it, by stealing the widow's third nettle in the name of the law.

Private ownership and control of land and capital is the means by which this constant looting of labour is carried on, the system which enables an idle class to divert into their own pockets the constantly-produced resources of the nation, leaving to the producers of those resources only a bare keep. Just so the ancient slave-owner lived on the surplus produced by the slave class over and above the slaves' keep ; and private ownership and control of land and capital is only a different form of slave-owning. It is a means of owning other men's lives, of compelling them to work for less than the value of their work, and putting the difference into the pockets of their proprietors.

To put an end to that is not confiscation, but the *prevention of confiscation*.

We Socialists suggest to you that *a sane nation ought to be its own proprietor*, and to organise its industry under its own control, so that its abundant wealth shall be available for the general national life, instead of being drained away in this tribute levied by ownership. We say that this tribute-levying system is the explanation, the only possible explanation, the unanswerable explanation, of the existence of poverty in a world of abundant resources. Private ownership of the means of production sets up a class whose members are fed, clothed, maintained and provided with incomes, without any effort or thought of their own, at the expense of the general resources of the community. They are not consciously dishonest. On the contrary, many of them are worthy and sympathetic people ; but blind, blind, blind to the real nature of their shabbily dishonest way of living. When one of the characters in Bernard

Shaw's "Major Barbara" refers to the propertied class comprehensively as "thieving swine," he is describing accurately enough the process by which capitalism works, but is doing injustice to the motives of these people. The fact is that they have never questioned or looked into the nature of their class privileges at all.

They take it for granted, as part of the order of nature, that forms of private ownership should exist over the natural resources of the earth, and should keep them supplied with all good things without the slightest contribution on their part. The tribute comes to them in the ordinary course of lawful proprietorship. They never ask themselves what it means, by what process it has come about that they should be born to a livelihood without having to earn it, to sit pleasantly at the receipt of tribute from the industry of their generation.

They do not even realize that it is tribute. Their natural human judgment as to the true character of things has been so dulled by acquiescence in a long-established order that, if they ever do think about it at all, they are actually able to believe that they *do* earn their living by the fact of being proprietors and permitting people the use of *their land and their capital* !

These people, who have never eaten a crumb of their own production, never contributed a moment's effort to their own maintenance, never even wondered by what strange device in the organisation of society things come to them as they do, or how it happens that their breakfast is always ready on the table at breakfast time, must, if they will really think about it at all, marvel at the fairy world in which they find themselves ; knowing, as they must know, that no human need is served without human effort, and that there must be something queer and uncanny about a social system which pours into their lives a constant and never-failing stream of the products of other people's labour.

They will sympathise with poverty, organise drawing-room meetings to discuss it, and charitable societies to alleviate it, and put themselves to any amount of trouble in that way, so long as you do not ask them to question their

own class privileges, or to enquire into the origin of their own resources.

And this one thing which they will not question or enquire into is the one thing that matters ; the one thing which, left unquestioned, reduces all their sympathy to futility. The whole problem of poverty is simply the problem of getting them off the backs of the poor ; of stopping the system of industrial organisation which, by means of the institution of private ownership of the means of work, enables them to live by confiscation and robbery ; and of organising industry under public ownership and control for the service of the national life, instead of, as now, organising it for the sole purpose of producing this tribute for a predatory class.

This private capitalist method of organising industry means the division of society into two classes—the secure and the insecure, the proprietors and the disinherited. It reduces the disinherited to the condition of having to sell themselves to proprietors in order to live ; the terms of that sale being that the entire product of the worker belongs to his proprietor, who pays back out of it to the worker a bare maintenance in the form of wages, and appropriates the surplus for himself.

If under this system, indistinguishable in any of its essentials from slavery, every member of the disinherited class were able to sell himself, if he secured regular employment at what would be called good wages, the injustice of the system, the mere brigandage of it, would still remain.

But it does not work out in that way. In actual practice it works out so as to give to the disinherited no certainty of even being able to sell themselves, no security against finding ing themselves at any time unemployed and resourceless. And so you get a wild scramble amongst the disinherited for the bare crust ; men taking to thieving and degenerating into wastrels ; women hawking their bodies on the streets for a living ; and all the wide-spread ruin of human life that we see round about us to-day under all forms of government, democratic or autocratic, tariffs or no tariffs, Christian or heathen ; all directly traceable to this dis-

inheritance of the people from their own means of work, and the private appropriation of those means by a non-working class. We have prisons, workhouses, brothels, full of the human wreckage produced by this system ; and a vast population with never more than the margin of a week or two between themselves and the pit, living harassed and graceless lives, their children habitually underfed, their homes squalid and unlovely—people maimed in soul, dull with acquiescence in ancient wrongs. All that might go to make a wide-spread happy human life for the nation is confiscated away from them ; and upon that confiscation is built up the culture, the daintiness, the sweet refinement of the life of the secure classes. Is it any wonder that, for the more thoughtful amongst them, this decorative garment of culture and refinement begins to feel like rotten rags as they realize what elements of human life and death are woven into it ?

That is the Socialist reply to the accusation of confiscation and robbery. When its opponents say that Socialism means confiscation and robbery, they seem to think they have proved their case when they point out that Socialism means putting an end to certain existing forms of private ownership. What I have shown is that those proprietary rights are themselves a system of confiscation and robbery ; and in order to establish the case against Socialism on this point it is not enough merely to repeat over again what every Socialist admits and glories in—that his purpose is to put an end to these things. What is necessary is to show, if it can be shown, where Socialists are mistaken in their analysis of the real nature of these proprietary rights.

You will also see the futility of those objections to Socialism which take the line of asserting that Socialism would deprive people of their savings. We are fighting, on the contrary, to safeguard them in the possession and enjoyment of their earnings and their savings. What Socialism would deprive them of is a particular method of using their savings detrimental to the national life,—the method of acquiring power over other men's lives ; and

Socialism would deprive them of that because such a method of using one man's savings means the confiscation by that man of other men's earnings.

In brief, Socialism would forbid slavery.³ You own men when you own the things essential to their life and work.

CHAPTER III.

SOCIALISM AND PERSONAL PROPERTY.

IN the preceding chapters I have been expository rather than argumentative. It has been my purpose so far to get into the mind of my reader a clear understanding of what the Socialist proposal actually is. It is, we have seen, a proposal to substitute for the present private ownership and control of land and capital the joint ownership of the whole people, through their organised citizenship, over the means of their own work; and to set up a co-operative organisation of industry in which production and distribution, under the administration of the workers themselves, shall be directed to social ends and the endowment of the common life instead of, as now, to the enrichment of a privileged class of owners. We are now in a position to go on and deal with the various implications of that proposal and the common criticisms brought against it.

Springing directly from the assertion of the Socialist case is the criticism which takes the form of declaring that Socialism is a denial of any right of private property. 'The instinct for personal and individual ownership is fundamental in human nature; and we are warned that under Socialism there can be no private property whatever in any shape or form. Everything will belong to the cormorant State. "The object of Socialism," says Mr. Balfour Brown in his "Economics of Socialism," is to do away with all private property"; and having solemnly committed himself to that absurd statement, he goes on to make elephantine play with it, pointing out that men must have something to eat,—"*surely that* will be private property "

—and wondering how Socialism proposes to “follow the morsel into the alimentary canal.”

The reader of the preceding chapters will already have the clue to such reply as it is necessary for Socialism to make to this preposterous nonsense. Against the assertion that Socialism proposes to do away with all private property, I set up the claim that Socialism is the most effective and emphatic guarantee of the sacred rights of property ever yet devised: that so far from abolishing private property it will make private property possible for the first time for the great mass of people.

I accept, fully and unreservedly, the premise that the instinct for private and personal ownership is fundamental in human nature; and I stake my case for Socialism upon the proof that this instinct remains, and must remain, thwarted and unfulfilled for most men so long as the production and distribution of wealth, the direction of the national industry, is allowed to be subject to private capitalism.

Let us revert for a moment to the analogy of chattel slavery. The abolition of chattel slavery was the abolition of a certain form of private property. But it was also the assertion of the rights of property for the slave. The particular form of private property which enabled one man to own other men was in its essence a denial of the rights of property to those other men, even in their own lives and bodies. To abolish proprietary rights which are in their very nature a denial of general human freedom is not to limit the rights of private ownership, but to extend them.

Now, what the apologist of private capitalism means by “property” is the particular form of property which brings to its possessor tribute from the labour of other men. He means property which is the source of rent, interest, and profits. And he goes on to confuse the issue (sometimes, I cannot help thinking, quite deliberately) by suggesting that the abolition of this particular form of private property, this power of levying tribute upon industry, means the abolition of all private property. It might just as well have been argued that the abolition of chattel slavery meant that nobody could possess anything.

The root of the matter, so far as this part of the argument is concerned, is in the difference between private Capitalism and private property. The opponents of Socialism, in sheer confusion of mind, talk (as the advocates of slavery might have talked) as though the two things were identical. So far from being identical, they are contradictory; the one is a limitation of the other. It is private capitalism which is a denial of the right of private property to the great mass of mankind, who are wage-earners; just as chattel slavery was a denial of the right of private property to the slave. The anti-Socialist argument upon this matter is the result of such confusion of mind as renders its victim unable to distinguish between capital necessary for the production and distribution of wealth, and that wealth distributed amongst and held by private individuals for consumption, use, and enjoyment.

Socialism, as we have seen, means the organisation of the national industry under co-operative control as a public service for the national benefit, instead of under private control for private profit; the transfer of land and capital from private direction to the direction of the whole people, acting as a co-operative nation for the production, distribution, and exchange of wealth.

Now, just project your thought into the future, not by a leap ahead, but starting from the present moment and following the process of Socialist development. Already we have a certain amount of public organisation of industry. As the strength of Socialism grows, that will grow. Public organisation will steadily absorb one industry after another away from private control and place it on the footing of a public service under national or municipal direction. Is it not perfectly clear that what the State or the municipality will possess, what the citizens will have in joint-ownership, at any given moment in the development of this process, will be the land and machinery and organisation needed for the work of producing and distributing goods or carrying on services; *the purpose of the whole thing being to get these goods and those services effectively into the life and possession and enjoyment of every citizen?*

Why, so far from denying the right to private property, the very point of the Socialist indictment of private capitalism is that it shuts great armies of people out from the possibility of having any personal possessions worth mentioning. This is not a matter of opinion, but a simple question of fact. The great mass of mankind live without any margin, with no sense of security for the future, and under the stress of constant anxious parsimony for the comfort, and often even for the bare nourishment and shelter, of the immediate moment. Of every nine people who die in this country, eight die propertyless. Of our population of 47,000,000, 42,000,000 are chronically poor, with incomes that do not exceed £3 to £4 a week; a standard which would be regarded as utter and desolating ruin by the owner-class if they were reduced to it. And of these a very large proportion are far below even that moderate standard, attainment to which would seem a princely thing to them; while for the whole mass of them who are wage-earners the cramped income is taken and spent under the constant shadow of precariousness, the sinister possibility, always lurking in any to-morrow, of unemployment and sudden descent into the abyss upon whose edge they hang. The income, poor as it is, has not even the quality of an assured thing, a real foothold. Every pay day may be the last; and there are very few wage-earners indeed who can say with any confidence that they will not be walking the streets, hard put to it for common nourishment, within the next year of their lives.

Turning from incomes to estates, the same fact is notorious: the great mass of mankind have no possessions worth mentioning. It is only a very tiny proportion of people who die leaving sufficient property to be taken into account. A few household sticks, hardly more than a load for a second-hand dealer's barrow, are all that the majority of people possess at death.

The fact which we have to face is that the vast majority of people are habitually living in such a needy atmosphere and amid such makeshifts that they have no imagination for the fine things of which life is capable, no security, no such serenity of mind and confidence in the future as to

enable them to plan their lives with high purpose. These things it is the function of property to give to its possessor ; and for ninety-nine men in a hundred they are as remote and alien as Sirius.

And it is private capitalism which is responsible for this lack of private property in the possession of the people. Private ownership of the means by which the nation produces its wealth gives to the comparatively small class of owners the power of appropriating that wealth as fast as it is produced. The wage-earner does not produce wealth for himself. In the economy of production he is not a human being at all. He is simply an engine ; so much labour power purchased in the labour market in order to produce wealth for his purchaser ; and paid wages in exactly the same way that the inanimate machine which he tends is fed with oil and fuel, to maintain him in working condition and efficiency for his owner's purposes.

If there is to be widespread private property in the output of our industrial machine, the machine itself must be owned and controlled by the community as a whole. We must all become joint owners of the means of our work. While the machine is privately owned, the output belongs to the owner ; and the wealth of the nation, instead of flowing in a life-giving stream into the homes of the people, flows into a few pools of great wealth, leaving the mass of the people propertyless at the margin of subsistence, living from hand to mouth upon wages which are only a fraction of their product, and merely represent the unavoidable expense to their masters of oiling and coaling the human machine.

It is, I therefore repeat, not Socialism, but private capitalism which is the denial of the right of private property to a vast majority of citizens. And the Socialist case is that the only possible way in which you can secure a widespread distribution and personal possession of wealth for consumption, use, and enjoyment, is that the means of its production and distribution should belong to the whole people in co-operative ownership. It is necessary

if the wealth of the nation is to pass equitably and fully into the homes and lives of its people, that they should become joint owners of their own land and capital, and joint directors of their own labour, instead of being themselves owned and directed, a disinherited class, for the profit and enrichment of their proprietors.

"Oh, but," it is said, "if there is to be this widespread private property, men will not use or consume all they get. Some will ; but others will save ; and if there is saving there will be inequality and accumulation in private hands ; and so you will get the evil of private capitalism all over again."

Really ? What is the evil of private capitalism ?

The evil of private capitalism is not accumulation. If a man chooses to live upon bread and water, and to accumulate the rest of his earnings, nobody desires—certainly no Socialist desires—to question his right to do so, or to interfere with his peculiar tastes and views as to how human life should be lived. The mass of people, given security for the future, would no doubt prefer to live a full life ; but if anybody thinks otherwise and prefers to live a bare life, that is his business and concerns nobody else.

The evil of private capitalism is that, having got his accumulation, he should be able to use it for acquiring ownership and power over the means by which our national work is carried on ; for by acquiring such power he will be able to compel the workers of the nation to part with their product to him to the extent of his control over their means of work. He would in that case cease to live upon his accumulated savings, and begin to live by holding up the industry of the nation to tribute in the good old way.

Now, truly, if there is private property there may be accumulation by miserly persons ; but it will be nothing more than the mere instinct for miserliness. Because, as a moment's consideration will make clear to you, just in the degree to which the industry of the nation has come under public organisation, the opportunity will have disappeared for using that accumulation so as to secure control over other men's means of work. The other men, through their organised citizenship, will own and control their own means

of work, as a sane and reasonable nation should do ; and they will be independent of the private adventurer looking for resourceless persons driven by necessity into selling their labour to him for less than the value of their product.

And there we get to the very heart of the matter. Property, in the sense in which private capitalism uses the word, does not mean simply the possession of things, but the possession of things from which rent or profit or interest can be derived. And we have seen how rent and profit and interest are derived from the surplus which remains out of the product of labour after providing for the maintenance of labour. Property in the capitalist sense therefore means mastery over the labour of resourceless men and women driven to sell themselves in that way because they have no access in their own right to their own means of work.

My title to the private ownership of land or mines or factories is quite worthless except on the assumption that there are such serfs available, propertyless persons with no other means of living than to sell their labour to me for less than the value of their product. Every such title, while purporting to be a certificate of the ownership of things, is, as Edward Bellamy has pointed out, a certificate of the ownership of men, deriving its whole value, as property in the capitalist sense, from the serfs attached to the things under the compulsion of their bodily necessities. Without access to the means of work, they cannot live ; and while their means of work are in the power and at the disposition of other men, they have no resource but to sell themselves into servitude to the owners. Without their existence as a helot class, without the denial to them of the rights of property, private capitalism would be valueless and title deeds worth no more than the paper on which they are written.

Let the citizens assume power and control over their own industry and over the land and capital necessary for it to operate upon, and the personal accumulation of savings becomes a mere matter of storing for future leisure or a harmless collector's mania. Its power to enslave other

men, a power entirely dependent upon securing control over the means of their work, disappears the moment they assume that control themselves.

Nothing could illustrate this more clearly than the customary description of the value of private ownership of land and capital as "the value of securities." To the ordinary capitalist, nothing is more alarming than the threat of a fall in the value of securities. Only a world with its notions of the elementary adjustments of human affairs, turned topsy-turvy could regard things in that way. The fact that security has a market value is the very worse indictment that could be brought against a nation insane enough to permit such an outrage upon commonsense and common justice. "The value of securities" is the measure of the general insecurity of men. The fact that security has such a value at all is evidence of closed access to it for many. Make security universal, make it as accessible as air, and as normal a condition of life as breathing, and it ceases to have any marketable value at all.

It is this price which people have to pay for security that Socialism proposes to destroy by making security the general possession of all citizens. And it is the destruction of the monopoly value of security which anti-Socialists have in mind when they speak of Socialism being the destruction of private property; for the value of private ownership of land and capital is nothing more nor less than the monopoly value of security.

The fact is, of course, that it is this private ownership of land and capital which is the destruction and denial of the rights of property, and the market "value of securities" is the measure of the extent to which that destruction and denial is carried on, the measure of the amount of tribute levied upon industry. The reduction, and finally the disappearance, of a marketable value for security will be brought about, not by destroying the rights of property, but by destroying the monopoly of them, by making them universal. It is the limitation of private property to the few that gives it its special quality—the quality which defines it as property from the capitalist point of view—

SOCIALISM AND PERSONAL PROPERTY 41

of being a means of levying tribute upon the national industry.

The price of any security, the value of capitalistic ownership of any property, depends entirely upon the amount of tribute it brings in to its owner, upon the yield and interest to be safely got from it. And the amount of that yield is the surplus which can be wrung out of industry over and above the cost of maintaining labour. It is to extort that surplus from the labour of a propertyless industrial population seeking for hire in order to live, that the whole system of private capitalism exists. The greater that surplus, the greater the value of capitalistic proprietorship, the value of securities.

You could at one stroke enormously increase the value of securities by repealing all such factory legislation as

or cheap child labour now restricted by the compulsory withdrawal of young children from the labour market. By some means, you could carry still further than at present the exploitation of labour—getting, say, a general reduction of wages all round by 20 per cent.—that further limitation of the general human rights of property would at once increase the value of capitalistic property. To sum the whole thing up in a single phrase, the value of capitalistic property depends upon its power of exploitation of labour.

So far as wealth possessed for consumption, use, and enjoyment is concerned, I think I can claim at this point to have made good my assertion that it is private capitalism which denies the right of any private property worth mentioning to the mass of the people. It is the object of Socialism to set that wealth flowing plentifully into the homes of the nation, where it now only flows in dribblets, and where even the dribblets are intermittent and uncertain.

Let us turn now for a moment to a consideration of the primary matter,—the ownership of land and capital as

distinct from the ownership of wealth held for use and consumption.

Socialism proposes to bring about this widespread guarantee of plentiful private property in consumable wealth by the natural and reasonable method of making the ownership of the means of its production equally widespread.

Now that, clearly, cannot be done by individual ownership in separate little parcels. The means of production and distribution in the modern world are not capable of being individually handled. They are great organised systems of co-ordinated industry which can only be handled by great organised armies of men working in co-ordination. An engine driver on a railway system cannot individually own the tools of his work. His engine is merely a fragment of a tool. Even the railway system itself is not a complete and self-contained tool : it is co-ordinated with a thousand other industries.

Thus, while wealth held for use and consumption is, in its nature, very largely wealth which can only serve its purpose of ministering to human life by being distributed into separate individual possession ; wealth in the means of production, wealth in the form of capital, is, on the other hand, in its very nature, only able to serve its purpose in the national economy by means of collective ownership.

If therefore, ownership of the means of production is to be widespread, it can only be so in the form of joint-ownership.

Now, I suggest to you that while national ownership is a denial of the right of private mastery over industry, it is not a denial of personal property in land and capital, any more than holding shares in a joint-stock company is a denial of personal ownership. It is personal ownership acting through co-operation.

To establish national ownership of land and capital is not to abolish personal property, but to make every citizen a proprietor ; to change the form of tenure of personal property in land and capital in such a way as to

guarantee it effectively to every citizen.* To abolish private capitalism is to put an end to the direction of the industries of the people by irresponsible persons for their own benefit, and to transfer that function to the people collectively, to be carried on by responsible agents for the general benefit. Socialism, as Bellamy points out, "would create a new system of property holding, and does not, either directly or indirectly, involve any denial of the right of private property. Quite on the contrary, such a change in system would place the private and personal property rights of every citizen upon a basis incomparably more solid and secure and extensive than they could have while private capitalism lasts."

It is, perhaps, hardly correct to call it "a new system of property holding." It is, in fact, nothing more than the application to the nation as a whole of the joint-stock system of holding land and capital.

A great amount of property to-day, especially property in the large industrial undertakings, is held in this form. Instead of being an exclusive owner exercising personal mastery and individual control over his property, the property owner to-day is generally a member of a corporation, one of a company jointly owning the whole undertaking.

His right of separate individual management has been willingly sacrificed for the sake of the greater convenience, the greater ease in acquiring and transferring property while still receiving full tribute from it, and the better organisation of industry, rendered possible by the company form of ownership. He and his fellow shareholders entrust the management of their property to directors chosen by themselves, and are none the less real owners because they have become functionless so far as personal separate, individual mastery is concerned.

There is no sacrifice or denial of private property involved in this. What the joint-stock company system

* The argument upon this point has been put most convincingly by Edward Bellamy in Chapter XVII. of "Equality," and it is impossible for anyone following him to do more than repeat his statement of the case.

of property owning demonstrates to us is that private ownership does not mean ownership in separate small independent holdings, nor the exercise of separate individual mastery and management.

If Socialism can be accused of destroying personal property on these grounds, the joint-stock company system can equally be accused of destroying personal property.

Socialism simply means making the nation the company ; and guaranteeing every citizen's position as a shareholder by making it inalienable, a thing inherent in his citizenship.

There is no abolition of personal property in that. It is the assertion of the right of property for all ; the emancipation of the people from servitude to property to mastery over property. The individual power of private management over the national land and capital disappears, truly ; just as it disappears under the joint-stock company system. But the essential characteristic of property—the distribution amongst the owners of the wealth produced by the application of industry to their land and capital—remains ; the great transforming difference being that whereas under private capitalism the owners are one set of people and the workers another, the former getting the benefits of ownership at the expense of the latter, under Socialism the citizens will be both owners and workers, the industry being their own joint co-operative industry just as the ownership is their own joint co-operative ownership, the distribution of the benefits of ownership being incorporated in and made identical with the reward to industry instead of being tribute levied upon industry.

Such a consummation will be the final vindication and establishment of the rights of men to property ; their establishment upon service and citizenship, a more secure, inalienable, and extensive footing than ever before in civilized history.

One essential difference between such a national corporation of property owners as Socialism proposes and the present limited corporations which own and direct our

industry will be the stability and security of the right to property. The shareholder in a joint-stock company at present can dispose of his share, but the citizen as shareholder in a Socialist State will hold his share indissolubly linked with his citizenship and with his obligation (the fundamental obligation of natural law, disregard of which is at the bottom of all our economic troubles) to render service. That is all to the gain of his ownership. It removes it from the mercy of accidents and from the range of gambling ; puts it upon a natural footing ; makes it an assured and indestructible possession.

Even to-day, when property generally stands upon the unnatural and unstable footing of divorce from any foundation in service, it is a constant endeavour amongst owners to secure this quality of inalienability in their possessions. Entailed estates, the tying up of trust properties so that the principal cannot be touched, are examples of this. The fact that the citizen as shareholder under Socialism cannot alienate his rights, and at the same time cannot separate them from the natural obligation of service, adds immeasurably to that quality of security in life which is the fundamental thing in property holding.

I know of no more ludicrous reversal of the truth in any controversy than the attempt to represent Socialism, which teaches, in an incomparably more positive and permanent form than has ever been taught before, the sacred right of all citizens to property, as an attack on the principle of property.

CHAPTER IV.

SOCIALISM AND LIBERTY.

"ALL this," says the doubtful reader, after a study of the preceding chapters, "may be very well ; but what becomes of individual liberty under such a system ? "

The opposition of Socialism on this ground of its alleged destruction of personal liberty could not be more effectively put than Mr. Asquith (now Lord Oxford) once put it when he said :—

"If you ask me at what point Liberalism and what is called Socialism in the true and strict sense of the term part company, I answer, When liberty in its positive, and not merely its negative, sense is threatened. Liberty means more than the mere absence of coercion or restraint ; it means the power of initiative, the free play of intelligences and wills, the right, so long as a man does not become a danger or a nuisance to the community, to use as he thinks best the faculties of his nature, the earnings of his hand or his brain, the opportunities of his life. The great loss counterbalancing all the apparent gains of a reconstruction of society upon what are called Socialistic lines will be that liberty will be slowly but surely starved to death, and that with a superficial equality of fortunes and conditions, even if that could be attained, we should have the most sterilizing despotism that the world has ever seen."

Anti-Socialists appear to think very highly of this piece of declamation ; for it has been published in leaflet form for extensive free public distribution, and anti-Socialist

papers have frequently reprinted it with an air of finding in it a final demolition of the heresies of Socialism.

Well, it is at any rate a clear challenge to Socialism. And since it is happily not a challenge in the nature of a mere expression of prejudice, against which no argument is possible, but a challenge upon a definite ground which can be tested by reason and demonstration, *let us take it up and bring it to that test.*

I reply straight away to Mr. Asquith's challenge with a direct counter-attack. As we shall see in a moment, there is a looseness of thought in his statement of the case which reduces his contrast between the negative and the positive aspects of liberty to mere rhetoric; but allowing for that, and taking the general sense of what he says, I accept his definition of liberty. I agree that liberty means more than the mere absence of coercion and restraint, and that liberty in the positive as well as the negative sense must be safeguarded. And against his assertion that Socialism would starve this personal liberty to death, I set up the counter-assertion that this liberty can only be secured to men by Socialism.

We begin, then, with assertion and counter-assertion.

What we must do to judge between them is to enquire, as closely as we can, what are the conditions essential to personal liberty in a civilized community. We shall then be in a position to judge how far Socialism is in accord with, or runs counter to, those conditions.

The assumption that Socialism would starve personal liberty to death is the familiar stock assumption of the anti-Socialist case, though it is rarely put in a reasoned form or made more than a declamatory assumption. The general anti-Socialist view is that of the British Constitution Association, founded expressly to check the spread of Socialism; which defines its purpose as being "to uphold personal liberty and personal responsibility, and to limit the functions of governing bodies accordingly."

There is a whole world of subtle false suggestion in the use which anti-Socialists habitually make of the term

“governing bodies” to describe the self-governing activities and agencies of democratic communities; as if public administrative bodies chosen by, and responsible to, the whole people were a sort of despotism over the heads of the people, instead of being simply the machinery of self-government by the people themselves. A moment’s consideration will show you that the attack upon Socialism on this ground is not an attack upon Socialism only, but upon the whole principle of democratic government, through representative institutions, an attack which, if it were well founded, would involve much of what Liberalism purports to stand for in a common condemnation with Socialism.

The assumption made as if it were self-evident, is that personal liberty and collective public action are mutually contradictory, and that to uphold the one you must limit the other “accordingly.”

My purpose is to demonstrate that this assumption is the exact reverse of the truth; that those who put it forward can never have taken the trouble to define clearly in their own minds what are the conditions necessary to personal liberty; and that when we enquire into those conditions and see them clearly, we shall find them to include collective public action and to be identical with Socialism.

Let us begin by looking a little more closely into the terms in which Mr. Asquith speaks about the negative and positive aspects of liberty. We shall, I think, find here at the very outset something of the confusion and looseness of thought which marks the anti-Socialist case throughout.

“Liberty means more than the mere absence of coercion or restraint,” he says.

I agree. The question between us is, then, *What* more does it mean?

“The power of initiative,” says Mr. Asquith, “the free play of intelligences and wills, the right, so long as a man does not become a danger or a nuisance to the community, to use as he thinks best the faculties of his nature, the earnings of his hands or his brain, the opportu-

nities of his life." . . . These are the things which Mr. Asquith puts forward as being "something more than the mere absence of coercion or restraint."

Now if you will look at these phrases steadily for a moment, you will see that there is nothing whatever in them more than the mere absence of coercion or restraint.

"The right of a man to use as he thinks best the faculties of his nature." What is there in that but the merely negative aspect of liberty, the absence of coercion or restraint?

The fact is that Mr. Asquith's attempted definition of the positive aspect of liberty has nothing positive in it at all; but is only a rhetorical expansion of his definition of the negative aspect of liberty, the mere absence of restraint. To say that a man is to have power of initiative, free play of intelligence and will, and the right to use his faculties, his earnings, and his opportunities as he thinks best, so long as he does not become a danger or a nuisance to the community,—all this is only a rhetorical way of saying that he is to be free from coercion or restraint in these matters.

It would seem, therefore, that it is Mr. Asquith himself who puts forward no constructive ideas as to what the positive aspect of liberty is as distinguished from its negative aspect. He appears to imagine that when you repeat a negative with rhetorical flourishes you turn it into a positive.

It is necessary, therefore, that we should attempt to supply for ourselves the definition of positive liberty which Mr. Asquith does not give us. He will not be a party, he says, to anything which threatens liberty in its positive sense; and by its positive sense he means "something more" than the mere absence of coercion or restraint upon a man's power of initiative, the free play of his intelligence, and his right to use his faculties, his earnings and his opportunities as he thinks best. But what that "something more" is he does not tell us. He merely recites a list of the things in respect of which we are to be free from coercion or restraint; a list which might be extended indefinitely without carrying us in the slightest

degree beyond the merely negative aspect of liberty. And by exploding these few rhetorical crackers and verbal fireworks in our faces in the hope that we shall be foolish enough to mistake them for the very definition whose absence they are intended to cover, he avoids the very issue which he himself has raised as to positive liberty meaning something more than the mere absence of coercion or restraint.

Is it not perfectly clear to you what that "something more" is?

If the absence of restraint upon the exercise of a man's faculties is the merely negative aspect of liberty, then surely the positive aspect of liberty is *the presence of actual opportunity* for the exercise of those faculties.

It is not enough that a man should have the right to use his earnings as he thinks best. To enjoy liberty in the full sense he must first of all have the positive opportunity to get those earnings. He must have *access to opportunity* before he can exercise his power of initiative or his free play of intelligence upon it.

If a civilized community is to safeguard effectively the liberty of its members, it has, therefore, a two-fold duty; the negative duty of refraining from coercion or restraint except so far as is necessary to prevent men from encroaching on the liberty of others or becoming a nuisance or a danger to the community; and the positive duty of providing and keeping open the widest possible range of opportunity, and guaranteeing to its citizens the right of access to that opportunity.

Thus liberty in its negative aspect means what the State is to refrain from doing; while *liberty in its positive aspect means constructive civilization, and finds its expression in the activities of the State.*

The whole worth and meaning of civilization is to make men secure in the possession and enjoyment of this positive liberty, this ever widening range of opportunity. Our advance in civilization depends upon the extent to which

the individual is set free from the individual gamble against the chances and accidents of life. Progress consists in men ceasing to have to struggle for their old objects, and so being set free to work for new ideals ; achieving security in lower things, and going on to higher things. The difference between civilization and savagery is just in that. The savage makes no progress so long as he has to be constantly occupied, constantly alert, in the business of defending himself from the possible attacks of other savages like himself. Civilization begins when men come together into a tribe and make collective provision for defence. The individual is thus relieved of the individual struggle for safety, and is set free for other things. Having attained to some degree of security in this respect, the tribe is free to think about other matters ; and the settled cultivation of the soil begins, the foundations of a civilized order appear. The law of the evolution of human society is that all progress, all human advancement in civilization, comes about by men being set free from being wholly absorbed in the individual struggle for the satisfaction of their lower wants, and so enabled to pursue higher aims in security.

And how are they so set free ? By co-operation and collective action. The old parable of the bundle of sticks holds good. It is the business of a civilized community constantly to set its members free in this way ; constantly to gather up the attainment of the race and embody it in secure collective provision,—in other words, in access to opportunity,—so that individual gambling and uncertainty ceases in connection with that attainment ; the struggle being constantly raised to the next higher level of human endeavour until that in its time and turn becomes part of the secure and completely mastered human heritage. That is the inner process of all civilization,—constantly to widen the range of that provision for human needs within which struggle ends and uncertainty ceases, and men stand secure within the shelter and guarantee of the collective life.

That is constructive civilization ; the positive as distinguished from the negative aspect of liberty ; the “ something more ” than the mere absence of restraint.

And if, at this point in the argument, it should be suggested that human life is a continual struggle having a disciplinary value in developing the strength and quality of the race, I agree ; but I put it to you that the value of the struggle as a means of human advancement depends upon what it is you are struggling for. To keep men in a state of struggle and uncertainty about their animal satisfactions, about such elementary needs as food, clothing, and shelter, is to keep them in bondage to their lower wants ; a bondage which prevents them from advancing to a human life distinguishable in its qualities from the life of brutes. Apes and tigers are under the discipline of that sort of struggle. There is no educational value to any human end, there is only hindrance to progress, in keeping men absorbed in the individual struggle for things which are within the general attainment of the race. To give educational value to the struggle it must constantly be pushed outwards to new frontiers of human endeavour not yet securely occupied. Civilization should extend always just in the rear of this struggle, gathering up and assimilating into secure collective provision what has been gained, establishing a settled order of life, and assured access to the widened opportunity, in the regions thus explored and cleared and made habitable.

That is the positive aspect of liberty : Not merely to say to each new generation as it comes into manhood and womanhood and responsible citizenship, " You shall not be interfered with in the exercise of your faculties," but " Here is your positive heritage of widened opportunity. Widen it again further for those who will come after you."

I assert, therefore, that the very first condition necessary to personal liberty in this positive sense is the social organisation of the supply of the primary material needs of life, so as to guarantee to every citizen, with absolute security, access to the opportunity of providing for his life in respect of these needs. That, surely, is one of the primary purposes for which a civilized organisation of society exists at all.

And I further assert—and here we get to the direct Socialist issue—that society can only carry out this purpose by collective ownership and control of the land and of the machinery needed to produce and distribute the material resources which are essential to the life and convenience of its citizens.

That is an assertion capable of proof as mathematical and exact as a proposition of Euclid. My case in reply to Mr. Asquith is that private ownership of the land and capital of a country is a denial of liberty to the great mass of the people., Liberty in any sense, positive or negative, is impossible for the mass of mankind while the industry of the world is privately controlled for private profit.

Here is a human being, with normal intellectual powers and physical capabilities, able to work with brain or hand. Our purpose is so to arrange our affairs that he shall be a free man ; free to use his powers and to enjoy what he earns by their use. What are the conditions necessary to that freedom ?

The very first condition is that he must have access to the means of his work. Standing there with the labour power in his body, he is utterly helpless unless he can get access to land and tools through which to exercise his labour power.

Put him in a prison cell between four bare walls. He may have the strongest brain, the finest character, the best physical powers in the world. But he will die if you leave him there ; and he will die because he is shut out from exercising his powers of hand and brain in securing the things needed for his life.

And if you break down his prison walls and send him out into the world, he will only be in a larger prison if he is still without a right of access to the means of work ; and he will die in that larger prison just as surely as he would in the narrow cell unless he can get that access. Whether the walls are actual walls of stone or the intangible walls of an economic system, so long as they stand between him and the means of his work he cannot live.

The primary, elementary, foundation condition, there-

fore, not only of liberty, but of life itself, is access to the means of work.

What is this man to do, then, in a world in which the means of his work are owned and controlled by other men, while he has nothing but his labour power? That is the system which Mr. Asquith defends—the system of private ownership of the means of the nation's work. What is the man to do?

He must live. He cannot live without work. He cannot work without access to the means of work. And the means of work are private property.

What, I ask, is he to do?

Is it not clear to you that he can only secure his life by losing his liberty? He must put his neck under the yoke and accept a master. He must beg his brother worm to give him leave to toil.

And what has he to offer to induce the owner to give him that leave?

He has only his labour power.

But that labour power, given access to the means of work, is able to produce more than he needs to live upon. Here, then, is what he has to offer to the owner—all that his labour can produce over and above the cost of his own bare keep out of it.

He must go to the owner of the means of his work and say, "Let me have the opportunity to labour, the opportunity of which you hold the keys. I can produce more than my own keep. All I produce shall belong to you; and I will be content with the bare satisfaction of my animal needs. I will ask for little or no leisure. You shall get me out of bed with a steam hooter at six in the morning, and I will keep at it till the night brings weariness. I and my class, we will live in a round of unceasing toil; and all we produce shall be yours, provided only you allow us back out of it a bare living. We will maintain you, we will make the world bright for you; you shall get out of our labour spacious homes, travel, sport, culture, and refinement, the beauty of life, rose gardens, our sons for your flunkies, our daughters for your harlots, and whatever else it may

be your pleasure to wile away the time with. Only leave us a little bread out of it all. We will live in little hutches in mean streets away from your quarter of the town, where we shall not spoil the beauty of your world with our ugliness and squalor. We will see our women folk become anaemic drudges at an age when your women folk are still in the glow of their youth. Our children shall be taught and trained to serve you on the same terms as we do. Take all the graciousness, all the leisure, all the delicacy of life ; only leave us, out of our own labour, the bare crust ; and perhaps (if we should get very weary or too disgustingly squalid) find a little diversion for yourselves in organising charity for us, serving on soup kitchen committees, and getting up fresh-air funds for our children. The means of our work, and therefore our lives, are in your hands ; and for the opportunity of access to them we must pay in this way. These are the terms upon which you can insist ; and unless we consent to them we cannot live at all."

That is the bargain which private ownership of the means of the nation's work forces upon the disinherited. The rigour of the conditions may be slightly modified here and there by partially successful industrial revolts, strikes, combinations amongst the disinherited, or even by the humanitarian sentiments of the owners themselves ; but the little more or the little less got in that way does not affect the essential facts of the bargain any more than the essential fact of slavery was altered because some slaves were more comfortably looked after than others.

To own slaves it is not necessary to own men. It is quite sufficient to own the means of their work.

You have them as surely one way as the other. Indeed, you have them at even a worse disadvantage in some respects under wage slavery than under chattel slavery. For under chattel slavery you had to maintain them in between whiles, when they were sick, or when one piece of work was finished and another was not yet ready to begin. But under wage slavery you avoid that responsibility. You can turn them adrift into the streets, and then get for your-

self a reputation for philanthropy by subscribing to the Unemployed Fund got up for their relief !

Private ownership of land and capital, the necessary means of the nation's work, sets up this great slave organisation of industry, under which men have no right to work (and consequently no right to live, which is involved in the right to work) except by permission of an owner. Only by such permission and on such terms can the mass of the people live so long as the industry of the nation is under private ownership ; and it is upon these terms that every wage-earner does actually live to-day.

How, then, can he recover his liberty—the liberty that Mr. Asquith is so anxious about ?

If it be true—and I claim to have demonstrated its truth—that ownership of the means of the man's work is the same thing as ownership of the man, then he cannot recover his liberty except by getting control of the means of his work. That, I submit, is a condition absolutely essential to personal liberty.

The question therefore is, How are the workers of the nation to get control of the means of their work ?

It is obvious that, in the very nature of things, they cannot attain to that control individually, each for himself. The tools of industry to-day are not capable of individual handling. As we saw in the preceding chapter, the tools with which the world's wealth is created to-day, thanks to science and invention and the development of the great machine industry, are immense organised systems of capital and huge masses of co-ordinated machinery which can only be handled by great co-operating armies of organised workers.

It is not the individual worker, but only the organised community of workers, that can take control of the means of work in the modern world.

And that is Socialism : the nation organised for the purpose of securing to all its members the right of access to the means of work, the democratic control of their own means of livelihood, making the right to live and to work a right of citizenship, a right to joint ownership.

Only so can the condition be realized which we have

seen to be essential to personal liberty,—the condition that a man shall have access to the means of his work as a right inherent in his citizenship, and not as a privilege at the mercy and by the consent of another man. To hold one's life at such mercy and by such consent is to live in servitude.

And Mr. Asquith tells us that Liberalism parts company with Socialism when liberty in its positive sense is threatened ! The only liberty which Socialism threatens is the liberty of a small privileged class to live by brigandage upon the nation's resources, to hold up the industry of the nation to tribute and impose their maintenance upon it by the device of claiming private ownership of the natural creation, and demanding toll for access to it. If that claim to private ownership of the land, of the natural resources of the country and of the means of work of its inhabitants, be admitted, then we are all serfs to the private owner and can only live by his consent ; a consent which he graciously gives to us on condition that we carry him through life comfortably seated upon our backs.

One further thought to clinch the argument. Is it not true, if you will reflect upon it for a moment, that Mr. Asquith and the champions of private capitalism who agree with him in denouncing Socialism as a sterilizing despotism—is it not true that by that very indictment they are conceding our case to us ?

For observe. Under Socialism, the State, through its national and municipal administration, would own the land and capital and organise the industry of the country. And that, says Mr. Asquith, would be despotism—sterilizing despotism.

Now, why ?

I suggest to you that behind that accusation there lies the fatal admission that ownership and control of the means of work is ownership and control of the lives of men. The despotism, the sterilizing despotism, of the State, which Mr. Asquith fears, would be the outcome of its ownership and control of the means of our work.

We are getting on very nicely, I think, when an anti-

Socialist ex-Prime Minister makes that sort of admission, There is a profound economic truth unintentionally avowed in this indictment of Socialism—the profound economic truth that the conditions of despotism, of sterilizing despotism, are ownership of the nation's work and control of the nation's industry.

Mr. Asquith's charming, cross-eyed, topsy-turvy way of applying that indisputable truth is to suggest to us that this despotism will be exercised in its most sterilizing form *if the nation owns its own means of work !*

If 999 men have their means of work owned by the thousandth man, and are at his mercy for the right to live, that, according to Mr. Asquith, is liberty, power of initiative, the free play of intelligence and will, the right to use the faculties of our nature and the earnings of our hands and brains.

But if the thousand men jointly own their own means of work and co-operate together as an organised community in carrying on their pursuits and activities, that is the most sterilizing despotism the world has ever seen !

What Mr. Asquith forgets is that the despotism which he admits goes with the ownership and control of the means of work is a despotism only possible when the people who exercise despotism and the people over whom it is exercised are different people.

The essential principle of democracy is involved in Mr. Asquith's indictment.

For if his view is a sound one, then it is equally sound as applied to political democracy as it is when applied to industrial democracy. It is, he says, a sterilizing despotism that a nation should manage its own industry instead of leaving it to be managed by private capitalists. By the same reasoning, it is a sterilizing despotism that a nation should make its own laws instead of having them made for it by a small privileged governing class. Get to the heart of Mr. Asquith's indictment of Socialism, and you find it to be an indictment of the very idea of democracy itself. What he asserts is that if certain powers can be exercised

despotically, you get that despotism in its most sterilizing form when they are exercised by the whole people acting for themselves through representative institutions, instead of when they are exercised as the privilege of a few irresponsible private persons.

That is a pretty sort of gospel to come from a politician who has spent the greater part of his life in shaking his fist at the House of Lords on this very same issue as applied to the control of the law-making machinery of the nation.

To sum up, therefore, the Socialist reply to the indictment brought against Socialism in the name of personal liberty is that liberty in the positive sense must include the right of access to the means of our work ; that capitalistic ownership of the means of work is a denial of the right of access except upon abject terms of servitude ; that such ownership is therefore incompatible with the liberty of the citizens of a nation ; that the citizens must control the means of their own work if they are to be free, in just the same way as they must control their own law-making ; that the industry of the world has got past the stage of individual hand labour in which the individual workman can exercise individual control over the means of his own work ; and that only by joint ownership, operating through citizenship and under democratic conditions, can the right of access be secured.

The Anti-Socialist says that he parts company with us when positive liberty is threatened. That is true. He goes with those who threaten it.

CHAPTER V.

SOCIALISM AND OFFICIALISM.

FOLLOWING naturally upon the indictment against Socialism on the ground of personal liberty comes the indictment on the ground of officialism.

The capacity of the ordinary opponent of Socialism for looking at the facts of life upside down appears to be unlimited. Living in the midst of a capitalist organisation of society which packs its working population away in miles of mean streets, with uniform little jerry-built houses all turned out of a mould and a deadly monotony and dulness everywhere, the average opponent of Socialism will tell you, without the glimmer of a smile, that his objection to Socialism is that it would destroy the variety and individuality of our lives. Face to face with the existence of the factory system, with its tens of thousands of women in the mills, leaving their babies with "mind-ers," and the consequent frightful infant mortality amongst the poor; with the family life of the cotton towns and of the chain and nail making districts; with the pottery towns where a large proportion of women are afflicted with potters' rot, wrist drop, and blindness; with the living-in system for huge regiments of shop assistants; with the armies of women on the streets for a living; face to face with all this, the average opponent will look at you solemnly and declare that he objects to Socialism because it would destroy home life and domesticity. It is in this same spirit of seeing things upside down that, under a capitalist system of industry organised for private profit, in which the workman has no shred of control over his own industry, in which his

getting-up time in the morning is announced for him by factory syrens, his meal-times prescribed for him, his hours rigidly allocated, and all his working days spent under the eye of the officials of private capitalism, so that if he straightens his back for a rest or tries to take a breather for two minutes, the foreman or the overseer or the ganger or the shop-walker or the superintendent or the deputy superintendent is down upon him, ready to pounce at a sign of easiness ; under such a system the average opponent of Socialism will tell you that he objects to Socialism because it would give officials so much power over us, and free-born Englishmen do not like officials !

Generally speaking, pretty well all the familiar objections to Socialism are of this character. What they suggest would happen under Socialism is nearly always something or other which is already rampant to a perfectly venomous degree under private capitalism ; and in nine cases out of ten one might take all that is suggested against Socialism, multiply it a hundred-fold, and then present it as a picture of capitalism in actual operation. The anti-Socialist advocate is seldom a wage-earner ; and his constantly expressed amazement at the progress of Socialism in spite of all his efforts, would be a good deal moderated if only he could be got to understand that the very things which he professes to dread under Socialism are at once recognised by every wage-earner as the actual evils of daily life and experience under capitalism.

Quite certainly this is so with regard to the familiar objection as to Socialism and officialism. In a speech he once made at Dundee, Mr. Winston Churchill put this objection very clearly. Socialism, he said means " a set of disagreeable individuals who obtained a majority for their caucus at some recent election, and whose officials in consequence would look on humanity through innumerable grilles and pigeon-holes and across innumerable counters, and say to them, ' Tickets, please.' "

Here again, as was the case with Mr. Asquith's indictment of Socialism on the ground of personal liberty, the indictment is not against Socialism only, but against the essential principle of democracy. It would be a cheap

retort, but a perfectly valid one, to apply Mr. Churchill's description of public representatives to any capitalist Government of which he was ever a member ; for such Government owed its position to the fact that its members had obtained a majority for their caucus at some recent election, and certainly it was not without its disagreeable individuals. As an argument against representative democratic Government in the mouth of a member of the House of Lords, Mr. Churchill's utterance would be apt and consistent. As an utterance by a professed believer in representative democratic Government, it is merely evidence of the fact that a natural propensity for saying offensive smart things may, if unchecked, land a man in denials of his own political philosophy. Mr. Churchill's excuse possibly is that, his speech being made in Dundee, he had travelled up before making it by one of our privately owned railways, and had been wakened up for the fourth time in fifty miles by somebody whose function in life it is to punch railway tickets.

It would, of course, be easy enough to treat this objection to Socialism with the light chaff which is perhaps all it deserves. But it is an objection quite seriously held by many worthy people, and there is nothing for it but to plod solemnly through the demonstration of its absurdity.

Let us begin at the beginning. May I take it that everybody is agreed upon this fact,—that the industry of the world cannot be carried on by individuals working independently of one another ? Three or four hundred years ago the processes of industry were largely individual handicraft processes. But, as I have pointed out in an earlier chapter, the growth of the machine industry has given us new tools, and they are tools which cannot be individually handled. The individual signalman on a railway system may handle his levers, the individual driver may handle his engine ; but the tool which he handles is only a fractional part of the greater tool of the railway system as a whole. His work is not complete in itself. It is meaningless and impotent in itself, It has no meaning or purpose or power except in co-ordination with the work

of thousands of other men, all fitted in so as to constitute the industrial unit of a railway service, which again in its turn is only a portion of a yet larger co-ordination in which other industries are involved. And so it is with practically all industry to-day. As the machine industry has developed the production and distribution of goods has become less and less an individual process.

Now, what follows from that? This, surely; that, industry being so conditioned, there must be supervision and arrangement of the work as a whole. Clearly that must be so. The engine-driver may be a perfect expert in his particular work of engine-driving; but he cannot take his engine out when he likes and where he likes. He must work under such supervision and arrangement of the railway system as a whole as will enable the public to rely upon trains starting from a certain place at a certain time and running to certain other places. The work of the driver, the fireman, the guard, the signalman, the station-master, must all be subject to this general arrangement of the railway service. And the duty of controlling and supervising these general arrangements cannot be left to chance. There must be persons responsible for the arrangement and the supervision. These persons are officials, many grades of officials; and organised industry cannot be carried on without them.

Now, see where we have got to. So far the argument is a simple statement of obvious facts, so simple as to seem almost unnecessary. But if you will turn sharply back to the objection to Socialism, that it would mean officialism, you will see at once that it is an objection which must be defined a little more clearly before it can carry any weight. An objection to officials is not an objection to Socialism; it is an objection to carrying on modern industry at all, whether under private or public control.

Evidently, therefore, the objection to Socialism on the ground of officialism means something more than a mere objection to officials as officials. Turning as carefully as one can to anti-Socialist utterances for light upon the matter, what seems to be implied is that there would be

some special degree of tyranny and arbitrary power vested in officials under Socialism, that they would be despots over us, ordering our lives in a vexatious way at all points. The *British Constitution Association*, in a leaflet which it issues on the question, says that Socialism "would mean the end of liberty; the Socialists would make every man a puppet and a slave of the Socialist god—the State. All men would become machines for the use of the State, their work parcelled out how, when, and where the officials of the State thought fit." The leaflet, which is an entertaining production in its way, goes into highly imaginative detail, and suggests that under Socialism we would be compelled to live in gigantic barracks where our meals would be divided out for us by officials, of such kind and quantity as the officials decide, in such company as the officials choose for us,—a pretty exact picture in all particulars of how, for example, shop assistants do actually "live in" under capitalism.

The obvious immediate comment upon that is, of course, that it exactly describes what now happens under capitalist officialism. Men are machines for the use of the capitalist, and their work is parcelled out for them how, when, and where the officials of capitalism think fit.

In what way does the proposal to substitute the nation—the workers themselves acting in co-operation—for the private capitalist as the owner and controller of industry, tend to accentuate the admitted despotism of officials now exercised over our lives? That is the suggestion; that under Socialism this evil, which is now about as rampant as it can possibly be, would be worsened, and that men would become more than ever the puppets of officials.

Is it not quite obvious that this is a complete reversal of probabilities?

For just consider. Officials are in any case necessary, whether under capitalism or Socialism or any other conceivable method of organising industry on the great scale. They stand for the exercise of an essential function in industry; the function of general arrangement, co-ordination, and supervision of processes which have passed

beyond the control of the individual workman and made it necessary to adjust his activities to the activities of tens of thousands of other workers in order to produce a complete service.

The point at issue is, therefore : What are the conditions favourable to the exercise of despotism in the performance of this necessary function ? And how far do private capitalism and Socialism respectively either foster or discourage those conditions ?

When a man is exercising the function of supervising and co-ordinating the work of a number of other men, the possibility of his acting despotically (I assume that everyone will agree that he must have a reasonable power of control) depends mainly upon three things :—How he is appointed ; to whom he is responsible ; and what is the purpose and motive of his appointment.

If, suppose, he is himself the sole owner of the business which he supervises, responsible to nobody but himself, the possibility of his acting tyrannically is at its maximum. Given a person exercising official functions in that irresponsible way, and it is clear that the only two limitations upon his power of despotism are that the men over whom he exercises control should be free to leave him without suffering a greater inconvenience than his despotism inflicts upon them, and that the purpose which he has in his business is such as to make tyranny against his interests.

Private capitalism provides neither of these checks. The men over whom he tyrannises are only free to " take it or leave it " in the sense that they are free to take it or to lose their employment and starve. The freedom of throwing up such employment is simply freedom to adopt a worse alternative, the alternative of taking a header into the " out-of-work " abyss. As for the second check, the purpose which private capitalism has in business is the purpose of making as much profit as possible, a purpose directly conducive to driving labour to the last limit of its capacity and endurance.

The condition most favourable to the exercise of despotism by officials is that they should exercise their function

irresponsibly, and that the men under them should have no better alternative to escape into. When, in addition to this, the purpose for which work is carried on is such as to provide a direct motive of interest to the official in driving and harrrying the men under him, then we have the conditions in excelsis favourable to despotism.

And, further, if this be true of persons acting on their own account, owners who are their own officials in the supervision of other men's industry, it is equally true of groups of partnerships of such owners, and also of the agents and officials appointed by such owners. For the interest of the agent is the interest of the owner ; he is appointed to carry out the purposes of the owner ; and the power of the owner is in no way altered or diminished when it is delegated and exercised through agents.

Now, if these be the conditions favourable to the development of officialism into tyranny—that the official should be irresponsible or the agent of an owner who is irresponsible ; that the men under him should have no alternative better than his tyranny ; and that it should be to his gain to drive his men—I suggest to you that private capitalism answers the description perfectly.

By whom is the work of supervising and co-ordinating industry done to-day ?—By private owners either individual or companies, and the agents appointed by such owners.

To whom are they responsible ?—To nobody but themselves.

What alternative have the workers ?—Only the alternative of unemployment, or of finding another job under the same sort of capitalist officialism.

What is their motive in business ?—To make profit.

How is that profit made ?—It is made out of the difference between what it costs to produce an article or carry on a service, and what the public can be got to pay for that article or that service when it is produced.

The officials of capitalism are appointed for the express purpose of securing that profit. Their duty is to make as great an excess as possible in the receipts over the expenses of the business. The cost of labour is one of

those expenses. Their duty, therefore, is to get as much as possible out of labour over and above the price paid for labour ; to keep that price as low as possible ; to speed the worker up, and to have an official standing over him to see that no moment passes without its maximum of work done ; to extract from every human machine the last ounce of energy. That is what the capitalist official is there to do.

Now let us turn to the other side of the argument.

We have now got so far as to see that private capitalist organisation of industry gives to its officials, its supervisors, and owners, the irresponsibility which favours tyranny ; that it gives no alternative to the worker of escape from that tyranny except into unemployment and destitution ; and, above all, that it puts into the business of the nation the motive for tyranny, the motive of private gain to be got by making the reward of the worker as much as possible below the worth of his output.

Now let us see what changes in these conditions would be likely to check and discourage the tendency to official tyranny.

And here we come at once upon plain historic facts to guide us. There is no need to theorize ; we have experience to go upon. For, as a matter of actual fact, the irresponsible power of capitalist officialism to act tyrannically is limited in certain ways. Its power used to extend in an almost unlimited degree over children. The officials of private capitalism, in pursuit of their purpose of making private profits as high as possible, used to fill their factories and mines with child labour. They used to purchase orphan children from the Poor-Law authorities, house and feed them in lean-to sheds built against their factories, working them twelve hours a day, and providing beds enough for half of them only, one batch sleeping while the other batch worked ; so that, as the Royal Commission report on the subject put it, the beds were never cold. They used to employ cheap girl labour to drag trucks in mines, half naked, with the truck chain

round the waist, along galleries and tunnels where it was only possible to go upon all-fours. They used to compel men to work with unfenced and dangerous machinery, almost every factory having its roll of recorded deaths and mutilations. They spent little or no money upon sanitation or proper conditions of decency in their workshops.

What has altered so much of all this ?—The limitation of the irresponsibility of the capitalist officials by the law of the land. The Socialistic principle of State interference with private enterprise.

Here, then, is something of a clue to the way in which the function of officialism in industry can be prevented—has, as a matter of fact, been prevented in many ways—from developing into despotism ; a clue leading exactly in the direction which we might expect from a study of the philosophy of the question.

For the essential thing, the really operative force, in bringing about this degree of improvement, has been that by taking State action we have given to the worker themselves, in their capacity as electors, the right to a voice in the conditions of their own industry. The defining fact about the capitalist system is the exclusion of the workers from control over the means of their work ; tribute-levying ownership acting irresponsibly on the one hand, disinherited labour under the compulsion of hunger on the other hand. And any action taken by the State with regard to the conditions of industry is, to such extent as it may be carried, a breaking-down of that separation between ownership and labour, and giving to labour in its electoral capacity a degree of control over its own life. To that extent, the control of capitalist officials has passed into the hands of the whole nation. They no longer act in complete irresponsibility. They act under regulations ; regulations which the men under them have a share in influencing and modifying. Such check as we have at present, small as it is, upon official despotism, has come by that means.

Following up this clue, it may be reasonably asserted that to make the supervision of industry a responsible

supervision is to check official despotism. Let the selection and control of officials be in the hands of the whole people acting through representative institutions, and at once you have the limitation of the public conscience and the opinion of the workers themselves placed upon official tyranny. Let the industry of the nation be carried on for public service instead of for private profit, and at once you have a check to the motive for tyranny.

These are the very changes which Socialism proposes should be made.

It would seem, therefore, that so far from creating an official tyranny, Socialism would set up conditions calculated to destroy the existing official tyranny. Granting the necessity for officials under any system, surely those officials are less likely to make industry a tyranny when they are under the control of the whole people, including the people whose labour they supervise, than when they are acting irresponsibly in pursuit of profits out of that labour.

We have already seen how experience confirms this by the example of factory legislation. There is also the further body of experience available with regard to such public services as are already under public control. In almost every case in which a tramway service, for example, has been municipalized, one of the first results has been a great improvement in the conditions of tramway employment compared with what they were under private capitalism. It is all the more remarkable that this should be so, because our public administration is still steeped in private capitalist traditions, our town councillors and our national administrators are still, to a large extent, men who bring to their public work the business methods and ideas of capitalism, especially with regard to the hire and treatment of labour. But the mere fact of public control has brought the influence of public opinion to bear upon the conditions of these municipalized and national industries, so that even administrators attempting to run public enterprises upon capitalist lines and in a capitalist spirit have been unable

to resist it, and the result is a general higher standard of public than of private employment.

All this is generally admitted. Indeed, when it suits *their purpose*, the opponents of Socialism are always quite ready to attack Socialism on the ground that it gives the workman too much independence, too much electoral influence. The very men who will in one breath tell us that Socialism means such a tyranny of officialism that we shall have to ask official permission to blow our noses, will turn round and in the next breath denounce Socialism because it makes the worker in public service too powerful. "Already," says *The Times*, "municipal employes form so numerous a body that they have discovered the use to which they can put their vote as a means of exploiting local government to their own advantage." Indeed, a whole literature of indictment of Socialism is in existence, based upon this idea and upon its alleged corrupting electoral influence; an indictment ranging from the notorious epithet of "bloodsuckers" applied by a former Postmaster-General to the men in the postal service, to the studiously moderate and reasonable statement of the point by Major Leonard Darwin in his "Municipal Trade." I am not at the moment concerned to deal with that indictment; I am only concerned to point out that it absolutely contradicts the indictment with which I am dealing, that Socialism would mean a tyranny of officials who would order every workman about as if he were dirt under their feet. The position becomes positively farcical when one finds, as is often the case, the same person putting forward the one indictment one moment and the contrary indictment ten minutes later.

The opponent of Socialism, sitting uneasily through the argument so far, is bursting to explain at this point that I have not dealt at all as yet with the most objectionable form of officialism which he believes would exist under Socialism. Reading such a leaflet as I have already quoted, in which it is asserted that under Socialism we shall live in barracks where officials will select our food and clothing and choose our company for us, I gather that the anti-

Socialist who talks in that way is of opinion that, beside the admittedly necessary officials engaged in the organisation of industry, there will, under Socialism, be an army of other officials engaged in supervising and regulating our lives generally.

If I do not deal very seriously with that notion, it is because there will not be any such officials.

One can easily see, however, how this delirious notion has arisen.

Side by side with the constructive proposal of Socialism for the organisation of industry under public control for the public benefit instead of under private ownership for private profit, there is a constant pressure (frequently urged by non-Socialists as the alternative to Socialism) for social reform within the existing capitalist order, pressure for a higher standard of administration in respect of public health, sanitation, factory and workshop legislation, and the like. Now, obviously, if you are to have a higher standard in these things *while still leaving the nation's business in private hands*, you can only enforce your standard by constant inspection and supervision; and so we have a growing army of inspectors and officials,—sanitary inspectors, and the like. Socialists, desirous of keeping the standard of life as high as possible even under capitalism, are naturally found supporting the movement for all this supervision of private enterprise, not at all because it is constructive Socialism, but because it does undeniably save us, while private capitalism lasts, from some of the more poisonous consequences of the existing order.

It is this kind of official that the anti-Socialist has in mind when he speaks of Socialism regulating our private lives for us and becoming a menace to liberty.

The reply to that is very simple.

In the first place, there is no arbitrary power entrusted to these officials. They are appointed to carry out certain set duties strictly defined for them. The sanitary inspector does not make the sanitary laws. He does not regulate the sanitary conditions of the town. He is there to see that the sanitary regulations made by the citizens themselves

are carried out. He has no authority or mandate outside the mandate of the citizens amongst whom he works, a mandate expressed through their representative institutions. He is the agent of the public as a whole, for purposes of which the definition and control are in the hands of the public as a whole. Generally speaking, the sentiment of "anti-officialism" in a town will be found most pronounced and emphatic amongst slum-owners, betting touts, milk adulterators, brothel-keepers, and persons who profit by the chaos and disorder of unwholesomeness. The official is the agent and executive servant of the general body of decent citizens, to whom he is responsible and from whom he gets his instructions. Human beings are liable to err, and under the most perfect system of society an occasional public servant may act arbitrarily. But the point is that he cannot continue to act arbitrarily; he cannot establish arbitrary officialism as a system. Under responsible democratic management of public affairs, official arbitrariness could never be for long out of keeping with public opinion, or be more than one of those momentary lapses to which every system dependent upon human agents is liable. Political democracy is the check, and the only possible effective check, upon the development of such officialism into despotism.

That, however, is only a minor preliminary point of reply. The substantial reply is that most of this business of inspection is only a temporary thing, a necessary device for keeping a little clearance in the constantly recurring muddle of life under private capitalism. Why do we need these inspectors? Because we do not ourselves control our own industry, our own housing, our own food supply. The scramble for private profits is what leads to shady transactions, to adulteration, to shoddy sanitation, defective drainage, the sale of food unfit for human consumption, and all the rest of it. Organise the supply of the necessities of life as public services, and the evil practices which we now have to employ an army of inspectors in constantly hunting down and trying to prevent, would disappear; because the motive for them, the motive of private profits, would no longer exist. So far from

increasing the number of officials of this class, Socialism would render most of them unnecessary. And in their place we should have the ordinary officials engaged in the carrying on of industry.

And those officials would stand in a relationship to the industry in which they are engaged wholly different from that which they occupy under capitalist organisation of the world's work. In the administration of industry under common ownership of the sources of wealth, the natural agent of the community in the management of particular industries would be the body of workers in those industries. This democratic control of industry from within means a morale of social service and responsibility such as is only possible in a Socialist State. The wage-earner who is merely a hireling for another man's profit can have no such morale of service and responsibility. But in a co-operative commonwealth his labour would be the expression of his citizenship in making the common heritage fruitful for himself and all his fellows ; and the Socialist conception of the management of industry is one in which the organised and co-operating workers of the nation figure as the directors of the conditions under which their particular industry can best make its contribution to the commonwealth.

The public officialism of to-day is mainly engaged in the work of mere inspection and prying, because the work of the world is done under conditions which make it profitable for irresponsible private individuals to adulterate our milk, sell us shoddy things at the price of genuine things, smuggle tuberculous beef into the market, subject us to typhoid by covering up cheap and nasty drainage in our houses. The public officialism of to-day has to be of this inspecting and prying and interfering character, because we should be swindled and poisoned right and left if we did not inspect and pry and interfere. It is not to the growth of the Socialist idea, but to the hideous defectiveness and pestilential dishonesty of private capitalism, that we owe the necessity for public officialism of this kind.

But public officialism under Socialism would be engaged in the actual work of producing and distributing goods and rendering services. This would not be a multiplication

of industrial officials, nor the creation of new offices ; but the transfer of existing officials from private capitalism to public industrialism. It is ludicrous to attempt any sort of comparison between such a public officialism engaged in constructive social service in the actual processes of industry, and the public officialism of to-day, engaged mainly in acting the detective to protect us against the foulness and dishonesty of an evil system of carrying on the work of the world. The real prototype of the Socialist official is not the inspector nor the detective, but the municipal electrical engineer, the public tramway manager, the school teacher, the medical officer,—the expert worker engaged in constructive services to the public.

So far from multiplying officials in the organisation of industry, Socialism would greatly reduce their number. Under capitalism, industry is bled for the maintenance of a great army of officials who would be quite unnecessary in a reasonable system of co-ordinated public industry. Many capitalist officials are not really needed at all for the actual processes of industry. They are there simply to slave-drive labour, the cost of the official being worth while for the sake of the extra profit got by driving labour hard. They are not there to assist in the actual processes of the industry at all ; but only as professional worriers, expert in the use of the whip.

And in the higher grades of capitalist officialism, unnecessary official places are made to provide incomes for huge numbers of otherwise resourceless persons related to the governing classes. Our industrial system swarms with these people like an old coat with vermin. Compare, for example, our national post-office with any of the greater industries under private control. We have one Postmaster-General, responsible to the nation. But in the capitalist industries—in railway administration, in shipping, in coal, iron, cotton, or a score of other great producing industries—the Boards of Directors are to be counted by the hundred. The professional directors of companies are a huge army, drawing in the aggregate many millions a year from industry in fees and perquisites.

And you talk about the multiplication of officials under Socialism !

Then, again, capitalism has its enormous army of useless officials in the duplication of the nation's work owing to competition ; officials whose activities add nothing whatever to the value of the national product,—agents, canvassers, travellers, advertisement managers, and the like—devoting their lives to luring the public into trading with Jones instead of with Brown, buying soap from this firm instead of from that, or travelling from London to Glasgow via Carlisle instead of via Newcastle ; —persons engaged in the mere effort of competition, adding not one farthing's worth of value to the world's resources by their wasted labour. Capitalism has battalions of such officials. The change from capitalism to Socialism would be an enormous simplification of all this, and with that simplification an enormous reduction in officialism.

I claim, in summing up the whole argument, that at whatever point and in whatever aspect you examine it, this objection to Socialism on the ground of officialism breaks down.

So far as it suggests that under Socialism there would be any interference by officials with the personal freedom, the personal tastes, the private life, of the citizen it is a delusion without a shadow of foundation.

In its suggestion that Socialism would multiply officials it is the exact reverse of the truth ; Socialism would reduce them.

In its curious notion that the officials of a Socialist community would act arbitrarily and irresponsibly, it forgets the root principle of Socialism, the principle of public control exercised through completely democratic citizenship.

Private capitalism means the surrender of the affairs of the nation to private persons to handle irresponsibly for their own benefit. It gives them private possession of the means of the nation's work, and so denies to anyone

the right to work except by their permission. You must get an owner to buy you before you can work and live ; and his ownership of the means of your work enables him to buy you without paying for you. You pay him to own you ; pay him all the product of your labour over and above your bare keep ; and he appoints his overseers and officials to press out of your labour the very last ounce of that surplus.

And the anti-Socialist suggests that if the nation changes all this, and becomes its own proprietor, owning and controlling the means of its own work, and appointing its own organisers and officials under its own citizen-management, that would be a change from freedom to the tyranny of officials !

I suggest to you that it will be the change from an officialism which is the overseership of slaves to an officialism of administrative service in the life of a free community.

CHAPTER VI.

SOCIALISM AND UNEMPLOYMENT.

THE Socialist indictment against the capitalist system would not be in the slightest degree weakened even if capitalism functioned in such a way as to avoid all unemployment for the disinherited class whose members have to live by selling their labour to the owners of the means of their work. For it is not an indictment merely against the extremes of misery which capitalism inflicts upon men. Capitalism, as we have seen, is a division of human society into classes, one of which, a small minority of the community, owns the other's opportunity to live. Our Socialist case against it is that a class division on such a basis is essentially unjust ; that no equitable organisation of society is possible upon a relationship between classes which gives to one of them the ownership of the other's opportunity to live ; that such ownership is in fact, the ownership of men, and the social organisation founded upon it cannot, in the very nature of the relationship, be anything but one of the variants of slavery. If under this system every member of the disinherited class had the certainty of being able to sell his labour—if, like the chattel slave, he could secure regular employment and maintenance for life under a master—the relationship would remain a wrong and degrading relationship, utterly incompatible with what human life and human associations should be in a genuine human society.

But it does not work out in that way. Within this hell of slavery to which capitalism at its best condemns the worker, there is a deeper hell ; the hell of being outcast

even from the chance of selling one's self for maintenance.

This hell of unemployment is not only an actual wretchedness for those who fall into it ; the constant fear of it darkens the life of the workers when in employment. As a wage-earner you live your life under capitalism in a poisoned atmosphere of insecurity and anxiety, always on the edge of this deeper abyss.

Here we are, a nation with abundant capacity for wealth production, with resources ample to secure a high standard of life for all our people ; but with the means of producing those resources locked up in private hands, and industry only allowed access to them on conditions of bare maintenance and the handing over of all the product to the master class. The function of the working population is to be allowed in by the day or by the week in order to produce wealth ; and then to stand aside and starve in unemployment in the midst of the bountiful products of their own industry while the owner works the accumulated goods off upon the markets of the world.

Such "over-production" as it is ironically called, invariably takes place under capitalism. Because the ability of the owners to work goods off upon the markets of the world depends upon the purchasing power in the hands of the mass of people, and the foundation of the whole process of capitalist production is the payment to labour of wages less than the value of the product, payment merely of maintenance while the goods are being produced ; in other words, the constant keeping of the purchasing power of the people below the value of the goods in the market. Hence those goods must accumulate, and periods of brisk employment lead inevitably to gluts in the market and to times of crisis in which production slackens and men are discharged.

And the remedy for this, according to capitalist reasoning, is that there should incessantly be more work, more call for wealth production, more frantic opening up of new markets in all quarters of the world at a rate rapid enough to prevent goods from accumulating in over-production, and to make up for the constant displacement of labour by invention and by the more consolidated organisation of

production. "The remedy for unemployment is more employment ; what we want is more work."

Ever since the beginning of the era of modern machine industry, the hope of the world for a solution of the poverty problem has been largely in the direction of reducing the need for labour. With all our great inventions and our power of getting increased production for less expenditure of labour, we are, says Mr. Edison, still only in the infancy of invention. The process which has already carried us so far will carry us much further, and the day is not far distant, he tells us, when most of the work of the world which now demands prolonged and arduous labour will be done off-hand and efficiently with little more than what is necessary to supervise a machine. And he goes on to argue that the stupendous increase of our power to produce the necessities of life with little labour must mean the coming of plenty and of cultivated leisure within every man's reach.

And what look to the progress of human knowledge and invention in the light of natural reasoning as to what its consequences should be have always asserted that of it. Bitterly as modern civilization has so far disappointed their hope, it is inspiring to hear it again and again repeated in the face of all the hideous contrary facts of modern life. The hope which Mr. Edison expresses has been the general human hope, the prevision which has cheered the inventor and philosopher, ever since the coming of modern machine power on the great scale. You will find it as a running accompaniment to the whole story of invention, the march music to which discovery has moved onwards.

We are, as Mr. Edison says, only in the infancy of inventions. Nobody can doubt that the developments awaiting us in the future will make our present achievement seem trifling and rudimentary. But if even our present powers and invention could have been prophetically known to the men of three hundred years ago, they would without the slightest hesitation have inferred the abolition of poverty from our midst as the natural consequence of such powers. It would have been incredible to them that widespread

destitution and lack of the material necessities of life should still continue when the human race had at its disposal the means of so plentiful a supply for all.

The history of modern civilization is the history of the frustration of this hope ; a frustration which everyone must instinctively feel to be against the order of nature, the thwarting in some mysterious way of the plain and obvious sequence of things. In spite of the defeat of human hopes so far in all this, the natural and instinctive perception of what should be the effect of inventions upon human life still persists, still finds repeated and ever repeated expression. Every sane person feels about it as he would feel about a mathematical problem which vexatiously works out to some such obviously absurd conclusion as that two and two are only three. It is against reason and nature to accept such a conclusion, and one goes back and back over the problem knowing quite confidently that two and two have not suddenly ceased to be four, and that the error must be in our own handling of the problem. So it is with this problem of inventions and the machine industry in relation to poverty. It is in the very nature of increased human powers of wealth-production that they should mean the disappearance of want and poverty, the attainment of security, of more resources for all human life. It is as impossible for a sane mind to believe anything else as to their bearing upon human life as it is to believe that two and two are anything else but four ; and if that expectation has so far been thwarted, one knows quite confidently that it is not because the quality of sane sequence, of cause and effect, has suddenly vanished from the universe, but because there has been some stupid blunder in working the thing out, some mistake in handling these great powers, diverting them from their natural and proper expression in human life.

The notion that " what we want is more work " is simply a tame acceptance of the blunder, an abandonment of the hope inherent in science and invention. It is as though the mathematician, having got his problem wrong, were to say, " I cannot be bothered working this out any

more ; I will accept two and two to be three, and arrange all my future calculations upon that basis." In a precisely similar spirit of indolent acceptance of error, the " more work " theory of how to deal with poverty asks us to turn our backs upon science and invention. For the dream of the enrichment of human life by means of science and invention is not a dream of more toil for men to perform, but of their release from toil ; of saving labour instead of making more demand for it. And behind that dream is the perception of higher possibilities for men than the mere material struggle for food and shelter ; possibilities needing for their development the release of men from drudge-work.

But now, it seems, we must abandon all that hope of fine things possible for men, and must begin to make our calculations for dealing with the poverty problem on the assumption that two and two are three ; that man is a drudge, and is fated to remain a drudge in spite of all his increasing powers and his growing knowledge. The problem, according to the " more work " theory is not how to lift the burden of incessant toil from men's backs, but how to multiply the burden, how to make sure that it shall be incessant, how to devise means for securing to men, as life's highest privilege, the opportunity of continually carrying it. And we are to regard all this, not as a burden at all, but as the golden opportunity of life, the thing to hope for and to plan for, man's destined happiness and the essential condition of his prosperity.

Clearly that is not an economic outlook only. It is a new and debased philosophy of human destiny, the philosophy of inevitable helotry for the mass of mankind. And so we find the economics of the " more work " theory supported by constant denials of the competence of men to live truly human lives. Every proposal to give men more leisure is met by the assertion that they could make no intelligent use of it ; that their release from drudge-work would merely mean rotting in indolence in a paradise of pots of beer and infinite tobacco. The denial of human

character to the mass of men follows naturally upon the denial of economic freedom to them ; it is the inevitable special pleading by which the robbery of opportunity from men's lives seeks to justify itself. To maintain a system of helotry with an easy conscience it is necessary to argue that men are helots in soul, fitted for nothing but helotry ; and so to abandon definitely not only the dream of what science and invention might do for human life, but also the very idea of human life itself as anything beyond the life of beasts. The dream of the release of men from drudge-work, which human hope has constantly seen in its anticipation of the progress of the race, has not been a dream of animal indolence, but of being set free from animal servitude to the satisfaction of our material needs, and so enabled to exercise our human faculties in security from want and hunger. To release men from incessant toil for these material satisfactions is not to make them idle, but to give them a chance of being humanly active, active in pursuit of these interests and delights which distinguish human life from the life of beasts. And it is in science and invention that the hope of such freedom lies, the possibility of lifting the burden of drudgery for material needs from the back of the race, and giving to mankind time and opportunity for living and for human development. All this is implicitly denied in the denial of economic freedom to men ; and more and more the denial goes beyond implication in the justifications which private capitalism invents for its class privileges, and becomes an explicit and definite denial of the fitness of the disinherited class for human life in any of its higher pursuits and purposes.

To carry our efficiently this acceptance of the idea of inevitable helotry for mankind, it will be necessary to prohibit invention and destroy machinery. If the remedy for poverty and unemployment is more employment, it is mere madness to go on devising machines by which one man in a day can do the work which previously demanded the labour of a dozen men for a week. Labour-saving devices are clearly out of place in a community

which holds by the theory that what its citizens want is more work. "On the wheat ranches of the West," says a writer in one of the popular science papers, "there has been developed and brought to a very practical standard a combined harvester and thresher machine. These machines cut, thresh, and sack the grain at one operation. As they travel through the field, one sees the cutting bar, fifteen to twenty-five feet in length, slicing its way through the standing grain, while on the other side he sees the steady delivery of the grain in sacks, ready to be hauled to the railway." Where is the sense of permitting that sort of thing to go on, as it is going on in industry after industry, if what we want is more work, more employment for human labour? If the "more work" philosophy is to stand the strain of practical application to life, its advocates must screw up their courage, in the sacred cause of human helotry, to the point of making labour-saving invention a criminal offence.

Much more logical and consistent with the "more work" philosophy of society is the sort of thing of which I was a witness the other day. Walking down a suburban road, I came upon a procession of carts to each of which there were six men roped, doing the haulage work which would, in the ordinary course of saving as much labour as possible, be done by a horse or a motor. Inquiring into the matter, I found that these were men registered as unemployed and provided with "relief work" in this way by the local authority. Some schemes of admittedly unnecessary road-making, leading from nowhere to nowhere in particular, had been devised for relief purposes; and it was arranged that it should be carried out with as little use of mechanical appliances as possible, so as to spread the work over a larger number of men. This, as my readers who are at all acquainted with municipal work at the moment will know, is by no means an exceptional incident; it is typical of what local authorities generally are now doing. With a heavy register of unemployed men upon their hands, they have had to set their wits to work to

devise all sorts of ingenious unnecessary tasks, and to get them done as far as possible by primitive hard labour.

Here, surely is evidence of real progress on the lines of the "more work" philosophy; the beginning of a system of deliberate abandonment of the means by which science and invention enable civilized men to save labour. Yet another evidence of progress in the same direction is the systematic emigration which is now being organised on a considerable scale. As a method of dealing with English poverty, this is essentially the same sort of thing as roping men to carts; it is a deliberate turning of our backs upon the gains and achievements of civilization. The flow of emigration is the flow of labour from the richer to the poorer countries, from places with developed resources and great possessions to places where there are as yet few possessions. Not only in the gross bulk of their possessions, but in their resources per head of population, the countries from which men are driven out are much more wealthy than the countries to which they emigrate. That a spirit of adventure should carry men of a certain temperament to such new countries would be natural enough; but that they should be driven by want and hunger out of the countries where resources are plentiful to the countries where resources are scanty, that is the amazing thing. Why do we send men from rich to poor countries for the opportunity to live; from England to Canada, for example? We send them because Canada is for the most part an undeveloped country, rich in possibilities, but poor as yet in the actual development of its resources; while England is well-equipped, well-found in all the resources and apparatus of civilization in roads, bridges, railways, buildings, machinery, and general development. And we send them out knowing that all they are wanted for is to help to make Canada what England is; and that in the degree to which they do it, and Canada achieves her ambition of becoming actually rich instead of potentially rich, the conditions of labour in Canada will become like the conditions from which labour is driven out here, and that a propertyless class of disinherited hirelings will swarm in it. The process may be seen in its completion in those

parts of the United States to which the stream of emigration was directed a generation ago. They now have their slums and their unemployed, their tramps and their criminals ; and have them in ratio to their increasing wealth and command of the means of wealth production. Labour has to look with most hopefulness for its opportunity, not to the well-equipped and wealthy centres of civilization, but to the remote outlying places where the gains of civilization are not yet established and the advantages of science and invention are as yet scanty.

It would seem, therefore, that the logic of the " more work " theory is driving us to follow, in principle, the example of those early trades unionists who smashed up the machinery which was supplanting their labour. They were, after all, only anticipating the arrangements made by my local authority for roping men to trucks instead of using horses or motors, or for emigrating them to remote places where manual work is still, for a brief interval, beyond the frontier of the great machine industry and the settled civilization of a capitalist order of society.

To the men whose only means of living is to find a market for their labour, it is by no means a blessing that wealth production which formerly required the use of their labour for ten hours should now only require the use of it for an hour. The new machine which multiplies wealth production for the owner, the new concentration and organisation of a trade which eliminates labour by eliminating competition, are to them only further limitations of their chances of selling their labour. The owner can dispense with them. They become superfluous. A certain proportion of them, driven out from a share in the useful industry of the nation, are taken into all sorts of service in connection with the luxuries and sports of the proprietor class, and by that process working class life is in a large degree degraded into parasitic industry ; the whole thing being maintained upon the useful productive industry in which labour constantly dwindles and dwindles in proportion to increasing output.

Science and invention are offering us the copious and abundant means of a resplendent national life. And this is the best use we have yet learned to make of the offer !

Picture to yourself a nation sane enough, far-sighted and courageous enough, to make these great gifts and powers the foundation of a national life, instead of the monopoly and endowment of a class life. Think of the possible splendours of it ! And then think of life in the slum quarters of your city !

The very processes of industry which would enable such a nation to guarantee a high standard of life to all its people, are the processes which, so long as they are privately owned and worked for private profit, drive out of employment the men whose only means of living under such a system is to find an owner to buy their labour. They make labour unnecessary. And they might be used to make all labour easier, to give increasing leisure with increasing comfort to all men.

The suppression of invention and machinery is, I repeat, the only logical and consistent line along which the "more work" philosophy can be applied to the poverty problem. It is no doubt true that for a certain period, while industry was passing from the stage of localized handicraft production for use and consumption in local markets, to the stage of machine production for the world's market, the enormous expansion of the market meant such an increase in output as to demand the labour of a larger population with machinery than was supported by the old handicraft industry. It is sometimes argued that this rapidly passing phase in the development of the machine industry is evidence of a permanent tendency for machinery to create a demand for more labour. That is the most absurd nonsense. The enormous expansion of an industrial population working at the machine industry during the nineteenth century was a fact local to those countries which had the advantage of a start, and for some time of a monopoly, in supplying the new world markets opened up by means of modern facilities for transit and communication. No such monopoly can be maintained.

Sooner or later the market countries set up their own machine industries, and become competitive rivals with the countries in which the first wild orgy of industrial expansion took place. The inevitable climax is already indicated for us in every civilized country by our armies of unemployed people, armies which must, in the very nature of things, increase and increase as machinery enables the work of the world to be done with less and less labour in proportion to output. This is so far recognised by capitalist economists as to make it one of their favourite theses that over-population is what we are suffering from, and that our remedy is not to get born,—in its way an extreme form of the emigration method of dealing with poverty, and an implicit denial of the complaisantly futile idea that the machine industry means an indefinite expansion of the demand for labour.

What we have to face is the fact that the development of the machine industry means the indefinite restriction of the demand for labour, a restriction bound to become tighter and tighter as machines become more perfected and in general use in all parts of the world. And both these conditions are inevitable. There will be no pause in the development of machinery and its labour-saving possibilities ; and there will be no retention of any populated places throughout the world in the stage of market countries without a machine industry of their own. There are wide areas of the world still undeveloped and capable of being exploited as new markets ; but such temporary relief from the spectre of unemployment in its industrial districts as European capitalism might have got from their existence is already negated by the entry of new commercial rivals into the scramble for them. The yellow races, the Hindoo, the Egyptian, are being organised for the raid upon such remaining markets, and the prompt result of opening them up is that they rapidly develop machine industries of their own and join the ranks of the raiders upon the dwindling remainder. The struggle for markets has already become ferocious to the point of life and death, and there is not an industrial country in the world in which the process of capitalist production is not visibly ceasing to be able to

provide employment for its people, a margin of whom are unemployed even at the best of times, while the "best of times" become more and more only intervals between rapidly recurring crises of bad trade in which unemployment mounts up to tragical proportions.

We are, therefore, already ceasing to get more work and regular work for our people by the expansion of new markets; and with the decrease in the rate of that expansion, due to the exhaustion of the world's undeveloped areas and the constant pressure of new commercial rivals, the natural effect of invention and machinery in diminishing the demand for labour operates with less and less counteracting check. If we are to be helots and to live by more work and incessant work, the prohibition of the machine will become imperative.

And the prohibition of the machine, the suppression of science and invention, is impossible. You might as well talk about the suppression of the tides or the arrest of the winds. It is not the preaching of Socialists that will bring about Socialism; it is the inevitable development of the machine industry, which will ultimately leave us only the alternatives of having half our population rendered superfluous to their owners and reduced to starved idleness, or of becoming our own masters and running the machine in the interest of the nation as a whole.

And the choice which a sane nation will make is not, I think, in any sort of doubt.

Such an outlook upon the future of the race as is involved in the "more work" view of the poverty problem is a negation of all our hopes of progress, a betrayal of humanity into never-ending servitude. If our utmost hope is that more and more and always more drudgery shall be available for men, to be sought after, fought for, clutched at as the full attainment of life, then indeed the heavens have mocked us, and our human endowment of thought and aspiration and desire for a life beyond the life of beasts is only a grim joke of the gods at our expense. We had better have remained cattle and been content. For we are, in that

view of life, a sort of cattle ; but discontented and unhappy cattle. And we are asked to acquiesce in this view of our human destiny, holding in our hands all the while the keys of life, the power to enfranchise our days from drudgery.

We do not acquiesce. It would be treason to humanity to acquiesce. It is against reason, against nature, against all that instinctive sense of things to come which quickens in a man by reason of his manhood,—which, in its essential defining quality, *is* his manhood. Man was made for no such final destiny as drudgery or to be another man's hind all his days. The destined purpose of science and invention is to make men's time their own for the pageant of life by releasing them from the incessant toil for a bare living ; to enable the necessary labour of the world for material sustenance to be done in a cleanly and dignified way without undue encroachment upon our real business on earth, the business of cultivating our minds and living happily in the exercise and enjoyment of those human faculties which are now suppressed in us by our bondage to the animal wants of existence. There is nothing ennobling, nothing disciplinary to any fine purpose, in toil for a bare living. We shall not begin to live in any real human sense until we have achieved mastery and security over that ; the mastery and security which science and invention offer us.

It is the private ownership of the machine which has so far defeated this hope, and made security and spaciousness a class endowment instead of the common possession of mankind ; leaving to the barred-out class no resource but to be hired as drudges by the masters of the machine and no hope but that the demand for drudgery may continue.

And it is public ownership, the co-operative joint-ownership by the whole people of the means of their own work, which will enable science and invention to do their beneficent work of lightening all men's toil, of making security and spaciousness the common inheritance of the race. To use once again Henry George's well-known simile, science and invention, with their great and ever increasing power of raising human life above drudgery, have so far been like a wedge driven midway into the life of the nation, elevating

those above but crushing those below. What we want is that the wedge should be driven in below the life of the nation as a whole, so enabling invention to fulfil the law of its own nature in uplifting the whole people into freedom from economic want.

CHAPTER VII.

SOCIALISM AND WASTE.

THE idea which we have now examined at some length, that the remedy for unemployment is more employment and that what we want is more work, is, we have seen, nothing less than an assertion of helotry as the permanent status of the mass of mankind. The means of work being privately owned, it follows as a matter of course that getting a master to buy their labour is the sole pre-destined way of living for the majority of men so long as that private ownership continues.

And we have also seen that, thanks to science and invention, the means of work are constantly developing in the labour-saving direction, constantly enabling the owner to get an increasing output with less demand for labour ; and that this process is confidently regarded as being only in its infancy.

Here, obviously, we have two directly contradictory forces at work ; on the one hand invention tending to reduce the need for labour and rendering men superfluous, and on the other hand the necessity of finding a master to buy him constantly forced by hunger upon the disinherited man. Clearly, therefore, if the helot theory of man's destiny be true, if wage-slavery is to be the permanent order of things, some means must be devised for counteracting the tendency of invention under private ownership to render labour superfluous.

We have seen that a temporary counteracting check to this tendency has been in operation, during the early period of the machine industry, in the expansion of the

market and the constant invasion of new countries by the traders of the capitalist nations ; so that for a time, in response to the demand for increased output brought about in this way, the development of machinery in the old countries has gone on side by side with an increased demand for labour. But we have also seen that, in its very nature, this is a temporary thing, dependent upon a few countries possessing a manufacturing monopoly, and bound to disappear as the machine industry is set up in the market countries themselves, and as they enter the list as traders on their own account. The natural tendency of invention to reduce the demand for labour has been masked in this way for a time,—the increase in the total output being sufficiently great to counteract the effect of invention in reducing the labour required for each industrial product. And we have seen, finally, that this counteraction is now ceasing to operate, and that the evidence of its cessation is to be found in the fact that every civilized country has its chronic unemployed problem. We are passing beyond the period in which it was possible for any one country to regard itself as the workshop of the world, and so shelter itself behind a constantly increasing output from the natural labour-saving consequences of invention. Just in the proportion that one country after another becomes equipped with its own machine industry and seeks an outlet in foreign markets for its products, the labour-saving consequences of invention are manifesting themselves with less and less check everywhere.

That is the increasing difficulty which private capitalism has to face. And in order to meet it, private capitalism is driven into what is perhaps the most grotesque of all its many absurdities,—the need for persuading ourselves into the belief that the waste and destruction of our resources is a good thing. As invention carries its labour-saving process further and further, it becomes more and more a necessary corollary to the helot theory of human life that there should be waste, destruction, useless indulgence by non-productive people in luxury upon the most lavish scale, in order to provide the opportunity of employment.

Incidentally, we may note at this point in the argument the very curious and interesting cleavage which this brings about between economic ethics and religious ethics in modern life. Every religious teacher, everyone who approaches the problem of human conduct from the point of view of character and right living, is agreed in condemning self-indulgent luxury, excess, and lavish ostentation. But the moment you shift the argument from the ground of conduct and the importance of character to the economic ground, the very practices which moralists universally condemn are transformed into virtues, and the self-indulgent luxury of the unproductive rich is praised because it provides employment. Similarly with war, which moralists condemn as a horror, and contractors welcome as good for trade.

Waste and the demoralization of life, shocking as they would be in any rational order of society, are indisputably necessary within the capitalist order of things. It is more work that we want; and to meet that want we must in some way or other nullify the labour-saving effect of invention. Private capitalism and the helot theory of life require us to turn our backs upon the gains of civilization; and if we cannot do so directly by refusing to use the machine, we can to some extent indirectly by wasting and destroying its superfluous product. Having got our powers of increased production, we must have a constant process of waste going on, culminating now and again in orgies—wars, fireworks, coronation seasons, and the like—so as to make opportunities for labour to replace the waste.

It is, of course, easy enough, if we were to begin by assuming the existence of a rational nation, to reduce to absurdity the idea of the beneficence of waste, the desirability of employment simply because it is employment. But we cannot begin by making any such assumption. The ordinary rules of sanity do not apply to private capitalism, which requires us to begin by assuming the helot destiny of most men and their daily need for an opportunity of selling themselves to a master as their only

way of living. It follows naturally from such a view of life that anything which provides employment or stimulates trade should be regarded as an excellent thing, no matter what moralists may have to say about it.

There is no more interesting chapter of pathological study than that which sets forth the function of waste in a capitalist society,—the function of the running sore in relieving the body of the nation from accumulations which would otherwise clog and poison it. Its function is a much wider one than that of simply enabling the disinherited man to live by providing him with a job. So far we have considered it only in that respect. But it is much more than that. Waste and the demoralization of life are as essential to capitalist economics from the capitalist point of view as from the helot's point of view. Except for the humanitarian sentiment of the thing, the master class would have no direct interest in preventing excessive unemployment if their profits could be got in just as well; and the record of industrialism under private ownership in the modern world is a quite sufficient answer to any suggestion that the humanitarian sentiment of the thing would count for a moment if the interests of capitalism itself were not threatened by unemployment and poverty.

The fact is that waste is one of the economic necessities of private capitalism for its own stability and continuance, apart altogether from the humanitarian aspect of the matter.

The owners of the means of the world's work get their surplus out of labour in the form of products. In return labour (including all the labour concerned, from the inventor to the last manual worker) receives a payment in wages of less than the value of the products. That margin of difference is the essential foundation fact in private capitalism, the objective of the whole business, without which private capitalism would cease to exist. The fact that in individual cases it is a speculation, that this or that speculator, instead of getting his margin of profits, may lose his capital, does not in the slightest degree alter the fact that private capitalism as a whole, private capitalism as an

industrial system, secures and lives upon this margin of difference and would cease to exist if it did not secure it.

Here, then, is our owner with his surplus out of labour in the form of products. Before he can enjoy his profits, he must market those products.

And to get them marketed there must be purchasing power in possession of the mass of the people.

You see, then, the fatal dilemma in which private capitalism finds itself,—that the very wages system by which it gets its margin of profits limits the purchasing power in the hands of the people to less than the value of the products which have to be marketed. If the wages of the nation were equal to the value of the nation's product, there would be no profits for its masters ; while if wages are less than the value of the product, the purchasing power of the people is too small to enable the owner to market his product. And every labour-saving invention, just in proportion as it is labour-saving, increases this disparity between the producing power and the purchasing power of the nation.

The actual details of the thing are, of course, always indefinite and complicated, oscillating from good trade to bad trade, from a less to a greater degree of disparity between product and purchasing power ; but the essential fact is clear and simple enough, and its steady tendency towards greater disparity is self-evident in the wave after wave of commercial depression, ever more rapidly recurring as labour is more effectively diminished in the processes of industry. The tendency is now so obvious, and the almost daily accomplishments of invention are so striking, that it is not difficult to look forward to a condition of things in which private capitalism and invention have been carried to such a point as to enable the product of the nation to be turned out by a comparatively small handful of men for a comparatively small handful of owners, the rest of the nation being rendered superfluous for purposes of production. Obviously, under such a condition of things the owners, after allowing for their own ordinary personal consumption, would have an enormous margin of possessions, over the cost of the labour needed to produce them ;

but it would be an unmarketable margin, because the nation would have no purchasing power worth mentioning.

The inevitable result of private capitalism, constantly appropriating invention for labour-saving purposes, is to limit the general purchasing power.

There is yet a further complication of the outlook from the owner's point of view. Not only has he to depend for realizing his profits upon a market which those very profits have largely deprived of its purchasing power ; but he has also to face the competition of his fellow capitalists in that market. It is this competition which drives him inexorably down the fatal steep of what, on the face of it, looks like the economic suicide of constantly limiting his own market by saving labour. If what the nation wants is more work, and what the capitalist wants is a good market, it might seem that the simplest way of meeting the difficulty would be to suppress labour-saving invention. But the competition of each capitalist with his fellows forces the pace. If he can reduce expenses and save labour he gets a momentary advantage in the cheapness with which he can put his product on the market. His purpose is to make his personal fortune out of it ; and so the reduction of the purchasing power of the market goes on in a race as mad as the race of piling up rival armaments between nations.

Here, then, it might seem on the face of it, is nature's checkmate to private capitalism ; the fatal flaw in the system in the fact that the very appropriation of profits restricts purchasing power, a restriction leading finally, as the disparity widens, to universal bankruptcy and economic suicide.

It is here that the economic necessity of waste, as an essential factor of private capitalism, comes in.

Apart from that economic necessity, and simply as a part of the fatuous muddle which private capitalism makes of wealth production, there is the enormous waste which goes on in the mere effort of competition between rival capitalists, the employment of vast armies of men, not in the actual work of producing or distributing goods, but in

persuading the public to buy those goods from this particular firm instead of from its rivals. The clerks, agents, canvassers, commercial travellers, advertising agents (and all the subsidiary trades, printers, and a host of others, engaged in equipping these agents with materials for carrying on their rivalry) do not add a single scrap to the national wealth. So far as any addition to the national resources is concerned, it is all sheer unmitigated waste. But it provides a great deal of employment, and to that extent helps to counteract the labour-saving consequences of invention in the actual processes of productive industry. Similarly with the hosts of little retail tradesmen competing in every district with one another for a market which, properly organised, could be served with a tenth part of the labour squandered and wasted in this way.

This particular form of check to the labour-saving consequences of machinery is diminishing. The consolidation of small, scattered, competing firms into joint-stock undertakings under a single control, the making of agreements in restraint of competition between railway companies, the supplanting of the army of small shopkeepers in a town by the single branch store of a great company which can compete them out of existence; all this is steadily reducing the waste of labour in the mere effort of competition, and the clerks and agents and commercial travellers formerly engaged in that effort are being thrown out into the general labour market. There is still a sufficient demand for services of this kind to relieve the labour market of a great number of men; but it is evident that we cannot look to the continuance of this kind of waste on any great scale as a means of providing work. On the contrary, the new consolidations going on in industry are now steadily emphasising the effect of invention in saving labour, and helping to increase the disparity between the products of the nation and the purchasing power of the nation.

The chief form of deliberate waste, brought about by economic necessity, is that of ever increasing luxurious expenditure by the unproductive rich, expenditure which calls for the personal services of vast armies of people for

whom no place is available in the ordinary business of producing and distributing the essential wealth of the nation. Beside the people engaged in direct personal service in this way, large armies of men and women are enlisted in a great variety of parasitic trades ministering to the personal luxury of the rich. In this way, and on a constantly rising scale of ostentation and indulgence, a good deal of the surplus extracted from productive industry is put into consumption, and the purchasing power which the appropriation of profits withdraws from the wages of productive industry is to some extent put into the life of the nation by wages paid in the non-productive and flunkey industries. And a very good thing it is, so long as private capitalism continues to appropriate profits, that it should spend them lavishly in this way. It is easy enough for the moralist to condemn self-indulgent luxury and ostentation ; but so long as the moralist condones the primary evil of the appropriation of profits from labour, he must also condone this necessary and inevitable consequence of it, necessary not only to enable the displaced multitude of workless people to live, but for the continued existence of private capitalism itself.

If the moralist has any sort of doubt upon that point, let him imagine, if he can, what would be the effect upon society if the unproductive rich were to take him at his word to-morrow, and while still continuing to appropriate profits from labour on the present scale, were to cease their expenditure on personal luxuries and indulgences and begin to live clean, simple, and wholesome lives without ostentation and lavish waste. Suppose they were to all read Mr. Masterman's book on "The Condition of England," and be converted. They live, says Mr. Masterman, in "a self-indulgence which in itself breeds satiety, and a competition of luxurious display which, in its more advanced stages, passes into an actual insanity." Imagine them saying, "We are sick of all this ; let us live reasonably and sanely."

The immediate consequences would probably surprise Mr. Masterman and his fellow moralists. Out into the streets would go regiments of workless servants, footmen,

butlers, dressmakers, upholsterers, florists, coach builders, caterers, jewellers, the staffs of hotels, restaurants, clubs and music halls, yacht crews, billiard markers, the providers of sporting equipments and the makers of infinite forms of frippery and display ; to be followed within a week by armies of people from the actual productive industries whose employment would cease with the cessation of wages, and consequently of purchasing power, amongst the non-productive workers. The industrial depressions and paralyses of trade of the past would be nothing compared with that which would set in immediately upon this moralization of the unproductive rich.

Assuming the continued appropriation of profits by a class of owners, it is necessary to the continued existence of society that they should waste those profits in lavish expenditure, the more promptly and thoroughly the better. The maniac thing is not the lavish expenditure of this sort, but the folly of the nation in permitting its industry to be run by private capitalism for the appropriation of profits, and its products taken as tribute by a non-producing parasitic class.

The nation, having its products robbed from it in that way, and being deprived by the very conditions of the robbery of a sufficient purchasing power to redeem its goods and secure them for its own use, gets back some portion of them by means of the luxurious and extravagant expenditure of its exploiters ; gets it back in return for service rendered to their luxuries and indulgences. This is a worse enslavement than the wage-slavery of the normal industries, inasmuch as it involves the degradation of labour from productive to flunkey occupations ; but it does at least provide employment and the means of life.

All this waste, if I may repeat the unpleasant analogy, serves the purpose of the running sore in relieving the body of the nation from accumulations which would otherwise clog and poison it. Healthily distributed, our wealth production would go to build up the strength and well-being of the nation. It is its interception and accumulation in products which cannot be marketed for lack of purchasing power amongst the people—lack of

carrying and distributing power in the national blood, to continue the analogy—that makes it a clog and a poison. And the waste which to some extent relieves the system is the only alternative to death, so long as the cause of the clog and accumulation, the appropriation of profits by an unproductive class, is permitted to continue.

What the proprietor class get out of all this is their ever enlarging range of luxury and indulgence. Only so long as waste ministers to them in that way is waste a good thing from the point of view of capitalistic morals. Otherwise, of course, there are many other forms of waste which they brand as criminal and punish with the utmost rigour of the law which serve the same economic purpose of providing employment as they claim to serve by their indulgence. By precisely the same reasoning as is used to justify the luxury of the unproductive rich we ought, for example, to honour the criminal classes of the country, without whose activity large numbers of policemen and prison warders would be thrown out of employment. The man who would go about burning houses down, blowing up bridges, and generally leaving a trail of wreckage behind him would be a benefactor to labour, for large numbers of men would be constantly employed in his wake repairing the damage. He would be helping to reduce a well-furnished country like England to the condition of an under-furnished country like Canada, and so making it “a paradise for labour,” a country with a large number of wants. The defence of the luxurious existence of an unproductive class, on the ground that they cause a great deal of money to be spent and create a demand for labour, stands or falls by precisely the same reasoning. The only condition upon which waste receives the blessing of current economic morality is that it should be on the initiative and for the self-indulgence of the proprietor class.

In a sane community, the desirability of any form of human activity would be estimated, not by its demand for labour (even the activity of the burglar produces a demand for tools and safes, and the activity of the poisoner is good for the drug trade) but by the social utility of the

work itself. To cite the creation of a demand for labour as a justification for conduct or indulgence which has no intrinsic justification, and is often morally indefensible, is to reduce all our standards of value in character or action to utter confusion.

A nation determined upon a fine human life for all its people, so far from devising more and more work, would set itself to the discouragement and suppression of a good deal of the work upon which many of our people are now employed. Indeed, without any direct discouragement or suppression, that sort of work would naturally disappear with the disappearance of an idle and irresponsible class of people making incessant demands for the waste of human labour in a thousand follies for the diversion of their idleness, as miasma disappear when a swamp is drained of its stagnancies and breeding places of pestilence. The production of things which degrade life, the carrying on of services which merely minister to the idle ostentation and corruption of such a class society as private capitalism places in lordship over the national resources, directing the flow of labour into debased and parasitic occupations, is not an addition to our national wealth, but to what Ruskin rightly calls our national illth. But from the point of view of private capitalism, the social utility of an industry is an irrelevant consideration. What alone is relevant from the owner's point of view is its capacity for producing profits or ministering to the owner's class ambitions in upholding his class scale of ostentation ; and from the helot's point of view its capacity for providing employment. Its capacity for serving either of these purposes is quite compatible with its being an utterly mischievous and wasteful thing. Slum property, in the capitalist distortion of life, is "wealth," notwithstanding the fact that the national welfare would be best served by making a bonfire of it. Similarly with battleships, indecent literature, patent medicines, advertisement hoardings, most proprietary foods and soaps and pills, the general ruck of newspapers, bird plumage hats, and all the myriad forms of wealth which keep their infinite variety of trades

going by turning crimes, nuisances, cruelties, and the credulity of ignorant people to profit.

The obvious common sense of regarding waste and destruction as a bad thing, and the production of socially harmful things as an evil to be discouraged, clearly does not hold good within the existing capitalist order. We must turn obvious common sense topsy-turvy. To the disinherited man whose only means of living is to sell his labour, the only thing that matters is the chance of a job ; and so far as waste or destruction or the starting of unnecessary or even of harmful industries gives him that chance, waste and destruction and harmful industry are good things from his point of view. And not from his point of view only, but from the point of view of the general philosophy of life which asserts that what we want is more work. Even the death of a friend, if it gives him a chance for his friend's job, is not without its pleasing aspect. An increase in lunacy is good for the building trade, the erection of a new lunatic asylum being a welcome provision of employment. In the same spirit, pretty well every civilized nation now keeps its army of consular observers all over the world on the constant look-out for any demand for goods in their districts, so as to advise the manufacturers of their home country as early as possible of the existence of such and such a market ; and our Board of Trade notices of this sort are full of hints and suggestions as to imbecile things, things with which our life has not the remotest concern, in demand here, there, and everywhere. We set ourselves to the making of any kind of muck or triviality for which there is a market ; eager for jobs of any sort, since it is more work we want and by getting jobs we live. The fact that the natives of some remote protectorate have taken to cooking their missionaries in iron pots instead of on the bare faggots sends a thrill of commercial expectation into the iron-pot trade. The decision of some tenth-rate power to have battleships which all the world knows to be foolishly unnecessary is heartily welcomed in the ship-building districts, and the particular district to which the contract goes, instead of regarding itself as being cursed with the toil of adding to the mischievous lumber of the

world goes crazy with joy at the chance of more employment.

The human race, considered as a community of sane men, would be better off if a large proportion of its "volume of trade" were wiped out of existence. But considered as it actually is, as a rat-pit of competing capitalists and of disinherited workpeople who must sell their labour from day to day in order to live, it is bound to welcome any imbecility, any preposterous savage habit of life, any outrageous waste or folly or cruelty which increases the volume of trade and provides more employment. To contemplate the facts of modern industry and attempt to deal with them by natural reasoning or judge them by natural standards of right and wrong or even by ordinary standards of sanity, is to feel as though one were living in a dream in some wild comic opera, where everything goes by contraries and all the ordinary rules of common sense are reversed. Assuming the continued existence of private capitalism, the birth of new coming generations into the comic opera, it is undoubtedly true that what we want and shall continue to want is more work, to want it with more and more furious urgency as invention makes less and less labour necessary for each industrial operation, even if we have to get it by wars, waste, wanton destruction, or inducing credulous people by constant and clamorous lying advertisement to buy useless or poisonous things, till the comic opera becomes a grotesque nightmare in which we run hag-ridden over the world, killing one another for the chance to make brass gods for this tribe of savages or cotton rags for that. The threat of war in the modern world is at bottom mainly that ; commercial rivalry in the hunt for new markets.

In that matter of advertisements to catch the ignorant and credulous, it is no exaggeration to say that the world would be the wiser, cleaner, and healthier if almost the whole of the things which clamour on our hoardings and in our newspapers for the custom of the crowd were taken out to sea in bulk and sunk beyond fear of recovery in the depths. A year of bonfires would hardly be sufficient, if we were suddenly to become a sane nation, to clear us of the noxious and pestilent things, not to speak of the mere

rubbish and lumber, which constitute so large a part of our volume of trade, the illth of the modern world.

Under such a system as private capitalism it is idle to talk of the public good, of morality, of patriotism and the national welfare, as motives in industrial affairs. Private capitalism is the direct negation of such motives. There is, under capitalist conditions, no such thing as a common national purpose or interest in industry, but only a scramble of competing personal interests at war with one another. The economic motive by which private capitalism inspires men to activity is the self-seeking motive, the motive of individual gain, operating quite independently of any consideration of general human welfare. Mr. H. G. Wells's description of attempts to corner the necessities of life—"the whole trend of modern money-making is to foresee something which will presently be needed and put it out of reach, and then to haggle yourself wealthy"—applies to practically all modern commerce and speculation, as carried on for private profit. Such an economic motive is in its very nature hostile to the public good; it makes it a man's business to aggrandise his private fortune at the expense of his fellows. To anyone with the slightest instinct for civilization, the slightest conception of national life as the life of a mutually helpful and co-operating community, the folly and danger of the economic motive of private capitalism is written large over most of the commercial enterprise of the day, from its gigantic corners in wheat or in cotton, or its huge fortunes made out of rubbishy patent medicines or snippet periodicals, to its pettifogging adulteration of retailed milk or its palming off upon the public of the dirty waste of bran under cover of the demand for standard bread. Always and everywhere the motive is to get something for nothing, to compel or cajole the public into paying you more than the worth of the things you distribute to it, to scrape together your own private hoard regardless of social consequences. We have, I repeat, no national industrial life or interest; each man is individually at war with his fellows and with the community, clutching at personal gain, taking advantage

of the weakness or folly or ignorance of other people, and always on the look-out for such chances as weakness or folly or ignorance may give of making profits out of them ; and angrily resenting the bare suggestion of a possible national interest in industry as an interference with trade and an encroachment upon personal freedom and initiative—the personal freedom and initiative of preying upon society.

There is, at the living core of every man's nature, weak or strong just in the degree to which he is a man, the instinct for purposeful life, the essential quality of sanity. Think of human life as a whole in the light of some rational conception of what organised human action might make of it, with its fine purposes, ennobling pursuits, dignified happiness, all within the human reach ; and then turn to contemplate the facts of life under modern capitalism ! What satisfaction is there in it for that human craving, what substantial ground for sanity to find any assured foothold ? Is it not the merest froth of purposelessness, like the bubbling and slime of snails crawling over one another when thrown to fester together in a bottle ? It is waste, purposeless waste, everywhere ; the utter sterility of life in all that man's hope of a fine destiny holds out to him. In his conclusion to the most powerful of all his wonderful pictures of modern life, Mr. H. G. Wells, speaking of the vast resonant strenuous career of scheming through which he carries the chief character in "Tono-Bungay," and of the national life in which such a career is possible, sums the whole thing up when he says : "It is all one spectacle of forces running to waste, of people who use and do not replace, the story of a country hectic with a wasting aimless fever of trade and money-making and pleasure-seeking."

Is there any sane man who believes that this imbecile muddle is the final expression of man's power of ordering his affairs rationally and decently ? There are times in history when long processes of thought which have been going on beneath the surface of things seem to emerge with startling rapidity, and almost before men realize what is

happening, old institutions, old methods, old forms of activity are giving way in all directions before the insurgent force of a new idea. Such an idea is that of the social character of a nation's industrial activities, of the collective organisation of our material resources for the benefit of the common life. Can we not begin to discern, can we indeed fail to discern, in the complexity of current affairs, the shaping of this idea into practical politics, and the certainty of its triumph over the existing chaos? To those, at any rate, who still believe in human sanity and have faith in the future; who know the world to be something more than a market and life something better than a time for besting our neighbour in bargaining; who take their citizenship in earnest, and have never consented in their hearts to the idea that the law of human civilization requires us to conduct our industrial affairs and regard our industrial resources from the point of view of the ethics of the sty, getting foot and snout into the trough first in a competitive struggle, instead of sitting down decently to a well-ordered table; to them the day is already bright with confidence in the mastery of human reason over these wastes and disorders.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOCIALISM AND LEVELLING DOWN.

WE have now followed to its completion our analysis of private capitalism and the presentment of the Socialist case against it, so far as its economic aspect is concerned. There are, of course, multitudinous details into which the discussion could be carried ; but the most exhaustive extension of the enquiry into such details could do no more than show them to be incidental to the main principles already stated in the preceding chapters. The purpose of this book is to state the Socialist case in its essentials, and the reader who has followed the argument so far has those essentials now before him for judgment.

Before leaving the economics of the problem, however, it is necessary—more by way of filling in the background to this part of the enquiry than of adding anything substantial to what has already been said—to deal briefly with a certain sort of attack habitually made against Socialism in the course of ordinary political propaganda.

The reasoned attack, in any controversy, must be treated respectfully and met with an equally reasoned reply. On the other hand the merely vituperative attack can be safely ignored, and left to defeat, as it does invariably defeat, its own purpose. Certainly that is so with regard to the vituperative attack upon Socialism. The habit of using the word “Socialism” as a mere missile in political warfare has been of great service to Socialism ; for by being constantly thrown at almost every proposal even for social reform within the existing order, it has created in the public mind a connection of ideas between Socialism

and all sorts of movements and proposals which the great majority of people believe to be beneficent, and so has helped very greatly to break down the very prejudice to which it is intended to appeal.

There is, however, another sort of attack upon Socialism which is neither the reasoned attack nor the vituperative attack. One can most fairly describe it, perhaps, as the rhetorical attack. It figures very largely in current political oratory, and consists chiefly in the invention of antitheses which, when you examine them, have either no meaning at all or a meaning in direct inversion of their own terms. One can best define the thing by instancing one or two typical examples of it.

As an example of the inverted antithesis, of rhetoric standing on its head and declaring the world to be upside down, take this saying of Lord Rosebery's.

"In my opinion, men work better for themselves than they work for the State. That is the issue between non-Socialism and Socialism."

Does Lord Rosebery know what a wage-earner is? By the very fact of his being a wage-earner, he is a man who does *not* work for himself. He works for a master. The land-owning class, says Lord Rosebery, in another part of the same speech, have rendered great service to the State, "they have been centres of employment and bounty." If the workman "works for himself," what precisely does Lord Rosebery mean by describing his own class as "centres of employment"? The fact is, of course, that not one workman in a thousand "works for himself." He works for an employer; for Lord Rosebery's class; for the mine-owner, the railway company, the factory lord, the landowner, who are his "centres of employment." Unless he can find one of the proprietor class to hire him, he remains out of work. He cannot work without access to the means of work; and the means by which the nation carries on its work are owned and controlled by Lord Rosebery's class. It is for them, and by their permission only, that he can work. There are a few odds and ends of casual ways of working in which a man can adventure

precariously for himself ; but they do not affect the general truth that our working population does not work for itself, but for employers.

So that, if we are to put Lord Rosebery's statement of the issue into a form of agreement with the actual facts of life, we must alter slightly. Instead of saying that "men work better for themselves than they do for the State," we must put it that

" the issue between non-Socialism and Socialism is that men work better for other men than they work for the State."

The necessary alterations, however, are not yet complete. The second term of Lord Rosebery's antithesis is quite as topsy-turvy as the first. We have seen that when he speaks of men "working for themselves" he is describing a state of things in which men do not work for themselves at all, but for other men. If we examine the other term of the antithesis, in which he speaks of "working for the State," we shall see that here again he turns the actual facts upside down.

When he says that men work better for themselves than they work for the State, his intention is to suggest to you that when they work for the State they do not work for themselves. And the actual fact is that working for the State is the only way in which, under modern conditions, men can work for themselves.

For the tools of industry to-day are not individual tools. Thanks to science and invention and the growth of the great machine industry, the tools of industry to-day, as we have seen, are great masses of capital which cannot be individually handled, tools which require great co-operating armies of men to handle them. A railway system cannot be run by each man in it "working for himself" individually ; and so it is in all the great staple industries of the modern world. The individual worker, self-contained and independent, owning the tools of his own work and working for himself, belongs to a past age. The only way in which, under modern conditions of the machine industry, he can own the tools of his own trade and work for himself

is by doing it in co-operation with his fellows. And the co-operation of the workers of the nation to that end is the Socialist State ; the people using their organised citizenship so as to own and control for themselves the means of their own work and the conditions of their own lives.

We must, therefore, make another slight alteration in Lord Rosebery's statement of the issue to bring it into full accord with the actual facts. We must put it this way :—

“ the issue between non-Socialism and Socialism is that men work better for other men than they work in co-operation for themselves ; ”

and so reverse the terms of the antithesis completely.

So much for the inverted rhetoric of anti-Socialism. For an example of its high-sounding but meaningless rhetoric, I do not know where one could find a better example of it than in Mr. Winston Churchill's attempt to define the difference between Liberalism and Socialism.

“ Socialism seeks to pull down wealth ; Liberalism seeks to raise up poverty. Socialism would destroy private interests ; Liberalism would preserve private interests in the only way in which they can be preserved, namely, by reconciling them with public right. Socialism would kill enterprise ; Liberalism would rescue enterprise from the trammels of privilege and preference. Socialism assails the pre-eminence of the individual ; Liberalism seeks, and shall seek more and more in the future, to build up a minimum standard for the mass. Socialism exalts the rule ; Liberalism exalts the man. Socialism attacks capital ; Liberalism attacks monopoly.”

That is such pretty rhetoric that, listening to it in a crowded political meeting, with the heat of enthusiasm in the air and the cheers ringing through the hall, one might almost imagine that it meant something. But if you will look at it steadily for a moment, you will see that, quite literally, it

does not mean anything at all. What we have here is not a misconception of Socialism and its aims, as with some of our opponents ; nor a failure to grasp the conditions and consequences of one's own philosophy, as in the case of Mr. Asquith's peroration on liberty. Here is not something for agreement or for difference between us, but merely a rhetorical flourish, loose thinking expressed in sounding words that have no intelligible meaning in them.

Take at random any one of this string of antitheses, and see. "Socialism exalts the rule ; Liberalism exalts the man." There is, and there can be, no such cleavage of interest between goodness in the man and goodness in the social order. Mr. Churchill talks as though exalting the man and exalting the rule of life were a kind of see-saw ; if one goes up the other goes down, and those who desire to exalt the one must necessarily desire to lower the other. The quite simple and obvious fact is, of course, that they rise and fall together ; that an exalted rule of life is the expression and realization of an exalted manhood. To talk as though men and the institutions under which they live move in reverse directions—just institutions being the social order by which unjust men express themselves, or just men being the coefficient of unjust institutions—is to talk meaningless nonsense.

Or again, "Socialism would destroy private interests ; Liberalism would preserve private interests in the only way in which they can be safely and justly preserved, namely, by reconciling them with public right." Here Mr. Churchill begins with a statement which, made unconditionally, is a grotesque distortion of plain facts. To say that "Socialism would destroy private interests," to say it in sweeping and unconditional terms, and to set it in antithesis to the idea of limiting private interests when public rights demand such limitation, is misrepresentation as unscrupulous as could well be imagined.

The fact is, as we have seen, that Socialism attacks and would destroy one particular form of private interest only,—the private ownership by one man of other men's right to work—and attacks it, not in order to destroy private interests, but to uphold them ; such a power over other

men's lives being a denial of private interests to the men whose lives are so owned and controlled. But apart from that piece of rhetorical misrepresentation, what precisely does Mr. Churchill mean by "reconciling" private interests with public rights in such a way as to preserve those private interests? If a private interest is in antagonism to public rights, you cannot reconcile them. There may be surrender on one side or the other, or compromise; but not reconciliation. The phrase is utterly meaningless. If some person were, for example, to set up a private claim as against the public right to Hyde Park, Mr. Churchill's way of dealing with it, apparently, is that we should uphold that private claim by reconciling it with the public right. He might as well talk about "preserving slavery in the only way in which it can be safely and justly preserved, by reconciling it with the freedom of the slave." Socialism asks for the destruction of such private interests, and such private interests only, as can be demonstrated to be incompatible with public rights and civic freedom; and stakes its case upon the demonstration that the particular form of private interest which it attacks, the control which private ownership of land and industry enables one man to exercise over other men's lives, is incompatible with public rights and civic freedom.

"Socialism attacks capital; Liberalism attacks monopoly." Socialism proposes to make the nation master of its own capital. To call that an attack on capital is sheer inability to understand and handle the English language. By the same reasoning, because Liberalism has fought, and fought well, to transfer education from private clerical control to public control, Liberalism may be accused of attacking education. Similarly with Mr. Churchill's statement that "Socialism would kill enterprise." Socialism would transfer enterprise from private to national control. To make the nation master of its own affairs instead of leaving them in the hands of a small handful of privileged persons is to kill national affairs! By the same reasoning, the Liberal attack on the House of Lords and the attempt to make the nation master over its own legis-

lative machinery through its representative institutions, is an attempt to kill efficiency in law-making.

"Socialism seeks to pull down wealth; Liberalism seeks to raise up poverty." That is not a sentiment original with Mr. Churchill. It is a favourite claptrap of anti-Socialism. "The Socialists," says an ex-Whip of the Conservative Party, "think the country can be improved by levelling down instead of levelling up." The quite simple and obvious fact is, of course, that you cannot level up without also levelling down. Mr. Churchill is apparently under the impression that it is possible to get something for nothing, to raise up poverty without disturbing the arrangement by which the wealth of the country is diverted into the possession of the few and the mass of the people are left poor. The thing cannot be done. No matter what your particular proposals may be, if you are to raise up poverty you must divert into the lives of the poor a larger proportion of the wealth of the country than gets into their lives at present. You cannot fill up a hole with nothing. Where does Mr. Churchill propose to barrow the stuff from?

To set out with the determination to deprive nobody of anything is precisely the same thing as the determination to endow nobody with anything. It is high time that this foolish claptrap about levelling up instead of levelling down, raising up poverty without pulling down wealth, was sent to the scrap heap of things discarded even by the sentimental rhetorician in politics. It ought not to be possible to repeat it to a sane audience without rousing uproarious laughter. Take it out of the abstract and apply it to any concrete proposal, and its absurdity is at once obvious. Every proposal made even by Liberalism within the existing order for raising up poverty—old-age pensions, the feeding of school children, labour exchanges, or whatever it may be—can only be carried into effect by getting the means with which to do it; and getting the means with which to do it is what Mr. Churchill calls pulling down wealth. And so long as Liberalism stands against pulling down wealth, it will fail to raise up poverty effectively. Take a case in point, the case of old-age pensions. Why was

a Liberal Government compelled to make such a half-hearted beginning? Why was the wholly indefensible Poor-law disqualification put into the original Act? Why is the age so high as seventy? All these are shortcomings in the Act, admitted by Liberals themselves to be shortcomings. Why were they compelled to put forward a scheme which they themselves very frankly say is a great deal below what they would have liked?

—Because they had not the money. In other words, because they did not believe in pulling down wealth sufficiently to enable them to raise as they would have wished the poverty of old age. The Act was to be amended later on—has, in fact, been amended in some degree; Liberalism in this matter being a little saner than Mr. Churchill makes it out to be—so soon as a Budget could be passed pulling sufficient wealth down, by super-taxes and so on, to enable the amendment to be carried through. Liberalism in practice has discovered Mr. Churchill's rhetoric to be nonsense; and that a Government cannot say "Hey, Presto!" and straightway wealth will magically appear from nowhere for putting into the lives of the poor. The thing cannot be done by any such conjuring trick. To believe in the raising up of poverty without believing fervently in the pulling down of wealth is to believe in an end without believing in the means to that end. People are poor in England to-day, not because England lacks resources, but because those resources are unjustly distributed. The system of private ownership of land and capital enables the small class of private owners to appropriate everything over and above a bare living for the workers. Increase the national wealth and the national power of production indefinitely, and the problem of poverty will still remain so long as this system of distributing the products of industry remains. To raise up poverty you must correct the unjust distribution. There is no other way. If the idle rich are to continue to appropriate the wealth of the nation, the workers must continue to do without it. The pulling down of wealth—whether you do it in an efficient and workmanlike way by nationalizing industry, or in a peddling way by permitting the robbery

of labour to go on and then taxing back some of its proceeds into the national possession for the relief of the poverty which it inflicts upon us—the pulling down of wealth is a necessary and inevitable part of the process of raising up poverty ; and to suggest such an antithesis between them as Mr. Churchill does is the mere feeble-mindedness of phrase-making without any coherent idea behind it. It is an antithesis as empty of any intelligent meaning as the clapper of a bell ; and if Mr. Churchill spoke in this strain generally throughout his once famous Dundee campaign the audiences who went out to hear him and heard Miss Malony's muffin-bell instead lost nothing by exchanging one tintinnabulation for another.

That is the sort of rhetorical opposition to Socialism which figures so largely just now in current political propaganda. It might seem, on the face of the thing, a waste of time to argue against it ; like argument against the rattle of peas in a bladder. And yet it has its serious aspect. It is nonsense, but it is nonsense with a very careful intention. It expresses the confusion of mind, the hesitancy, in which the would-be social reformer finds himself stuck so long as he refuses the Socialist stepping-stone out of the morass of poverty.

For take such an utterance as this of Mr. Churchill's as a whole. Although each phrase is seen to be meaningless when you look into it, yet the thing as a whole leaves a general impression of the purpose of the speaker. Is not the general impression just this,—that he is endeavouring to face both ways, to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds ; to persuade the poor and disinherited that he proposes to set things right for them, and at the same time to tip the wink to the propertied and employing classes that they are not going to be hampered and need not be alarmed? Done adroitly, with that power of verbose mystification of which the late Mr. Gladstone was such a supreme master, this kind of rhetorical thimble-erig is very effective ; so effective that both parties who are being asked to put their money on the game would be willing to swear that the pea is really and truly under their particular thimble ; though

in these days of a steadily rising standard of education even a master would be hard put to it to make the thing convincing.

This attempt to face both ways, the pretence of being at the same time the friend of the poor and the preserver of the privileges of the rich, the struggle to reconcile irreconcilable things, while it manifests itself in the case of the professional politician in mere vote-hunting and the endeavour to secure for his party the support of opposing interests, is evidence of the very real and uncomfortable dilemma in which social reformers who stop short of Socialism find themselves to-day. I have not troubled the reader of this book with any discussion as to the position of English political parties in relation to Socialism. I am very little concerned about political parties. They are what public opinion makes them; and an idea which becomes dominant in public opinion will not have long to wait before the professional politicians of all parties are tumbling over one another in their haste to do it service. The opinions of the Churchills of to-day are not the opinions of the Churchills of yesterday, nor what the opinions of the Churchills will be to-morrow. The only thing that really matters is the formation of public opinion. But it is impossible altogether to avoid glancing at the position of political parties in this matter; and the merest glance is enough to show their distraction.

Every political party has behind it, as the arbiter of its fate, a vast population living in the dim underworld of poverty, a population becoming conscious of its deprivations; a population with votes, beginning to realize that those votes mean a power of citizenship in the control of industry, power of dealing with the distribution of wealth, of breaking down the walls of economic privilege which keep the sunshine out of their lives. And this population has taken to discussing economics, and is becoming clamorous in its demand for life more in the sunshine, for human enjoyments, for security against privation. It is becoming conscious not only of its material deprivations, but of its mental and spiritual deprivations. It is clamouring for education as well as for bodily nourishment and security,

for full human participation in the philosophy and thought of the race ; clamorous, in a word, for its human status so long suppressed in helotry and servitude. And political parties, dependent upon electoral support, are engaged in furious competition for its votes. At every general election, in every Parliamentary session, the bids become higher and higher,—old-age pensions, the reduction of the hours of labour, the feeding of school children, provision against sickness, incapacity, and unemployment,—a constantly rising scale of endeavour to convince the wage-earning elector that Codlin is the friend, and not Short ; and above all to divert his mind from the horrifying idea that he can dispense with both Codlin and Short, and work out his own salvation by the organisation of his own class for the capture of political power.

And the moment that a political caucus gets into power on the strength of these electoral promises, it is brought sharply face to face with the fact that it cannot honour its pledges without ways and means. All these promises involve some degree of redistribution of our national wealth. To accomplish any of them means the diversion into the lives of the poor of some of the wealth which now goes elsewhere. The empty cisterns of human life cannot be filled with perorations, however eloquent. It is a question of actual wealth, of bread and butter, of clothes, of good houses, of command of medical skill, of provision against sickness and old age, of ample means to start the children in life, of making actual resources available.

To approach the task of fulfilling these promises with a determination not to interfere with anybody's private interests, not to pull down wealth, is to reduce the whole thing to sterility at the outset. The dilemma of the non-Socialist social reformer is that he cannot effectively will the end because his reluctance to pull down wealth debars him from effectively willing the means. In this dilemma, our politicians, with the ingenuity of their tribe, are seeking to excuse themselves for inaction or feebleness of action by setting up, as a new article in our political faith, that all these changes must be carried out very slowly ; that the

wise politician always takes, not merely two, but a hundred bites at every cherry. The gospel of going slowly and doing things by long drawn-out instalments is being adopted as the sham-philosophical stock excuse of the capitalist parties for their inability, standing as they do for existing rights of property, to deal even with their peddling social reforms in an adequate manner. What it means in actual practice is that social injustices are to be given the most prolonged run that dilatory legislation can devise for them; that reform is to be squeezed out in dribblets ingeniously calculated to be just sufficient to prevent violent outbreaks of public discontent. I deny both the wisdom and the expediency of this new gospel of going slowly. It is a gospel only for those who cannot see clearly the work before them, or who are torn between conflicting allegiance to the cause of the people and the cause of class privilege. Once a social evil is clearly understood, and the effective method of handling it clearly known, there is no virtue whatever in dealing with it piecemeal, in temporizing with the injustice. It is a foolish and cowardly gospel, this of going slowly; of turning old age pensions into very old-age pensions, of always putting off till next year as much of this year's work as possible, of doing the least that you can instead of the most that you might towards clearing injustice out of human life; cowardly because it holds out hopes in its perorations which it has not the courage to pursue in its action, and foolish because the propertied class will offer just as much fury of resistance to expropriation by dribblets as they could offer to a whole-hearted attack upon their class privilege of retaining the national resources for their own personal and unearned indulgence.

Happily the matter does not rest with the professional politicians. It rests with public opinion, with the demand of the people for full human life, and the urgency with which they make that demand and organise their political power for insisting upon it.

The very form which this expropriation by dribblets takes—the form of taxation—is in itself evidence of timidity in asserting the demand of the people for full

human life. My purpose in this chapter has been to show that even this timid and hesitant "warfare upon poverty" cannot be carried on without warfare upon wealth; that you cannot level up even in this small way without a corresponding levelling down somewhere. But if the warfare upon poverty is to become really implacable, the method of taxation must give place to the method of direct national organisation of industry. To leave a privileged class in control of the sources of the nation's wealth, and to tax a little here and a little there out of the incomes they get by means of that control is folly. It is a method which still leaves in full operation the direction of industry into wasteful channels, still leaves the pursuit of private profits as the dominant factor in deciding what our national activities shall be; with such wasteful and degrading consequences as we saw in the last chapter are due to the dominance of that motive in industry. What we want is not a contribution, by taxation, from the incomes of the masters of land and industry, but national control over the sources of the national wealth.

CHAPTER IX.

SOCIALISM AND HUMAN NATURE.

DRIVEN from its economic entrenchments, convicted of waste, inefficiency and misdirection in production, of flagrant dishonesty and injustice in distribution, and of such a failure to make the available resources of the nation meet the requirements of the life of the nation as would disgrace a community of savages, private capitalism sets up as its final defence the plea that it is human nature that these things should be as they are. You cannot, it tells us, alter human nature by altering the material conditions under which men live. True and lasting reform must begin with the individual. When you have made the individual good, when you have eradicated selfishness and combativeness from his character, when you have altered his human nature, then material conditions will naturally adjust themselves to that change, "and goodness," as one of the Bishops recently put it, "will then work its own blessed way in the world." If, on the other hand, you alter material conditions without first altering human nature, you will have accomplished nothing. The argument generally finishes with an elegant metaphor to the effect that if you turn a pig into a drawing-room, it will make a sty of it; and that if you will put human nature as it is at present under good material conditions it will soon befool them again.

Incidentally, it may be noted in passing that this argument proves a great deal too much. For the people who talk in that way about Socialism leaving human nature out of account will, nine times out of ten, assure you that they are just as distressed about the problem of poverty

as Socialists are, and just as desirous of dealing with it ; and that while they do not believe in Socialism they do believe in what they are pleased to call social reforms. I would point out to them that the argument about human nature and the folly of putting pigs into drawing-rooms, if it be a sound argument, destroys their case for social reforms just as completely as it destroys my case for Socialism. It is an argument against a Liberal or a Conservative Housing Act just as much as it is against the Socialist proposal for municipalising housing accommodation. Although the argument is only adduced against Socialism, it is an argument equally applicable to the making of any change whatever in material conditions, whether by political action or by any of the various philanthropic agencies at work amongst us, with a view to the improvement of human life by securing men and women against material want. To be consistent, those who use this human nature argument against Socialism ought to withdraw from politics altogether and refuse—as I believe one or two of the minor religious sects do actually advise their members to refuse—even to vote at elections, on the ground that the only thing worth doing is to get the individual soul saved for an hereafter, leaving human nature, essentially evil as it is, to dominate this world with injustice as much as it pleases. That is a logical and consistent position. But to oppose Socialism on the “human nature” ground, and then to go on advocating better housing, better sanitation, old-age pensions, fresh-air funds, the provision of public parks and gardens, and a thousand other things, great and small, intended to improve the national life by improving its material circumstances, is neither logical nor consistent, but only the folly of repeating a catchword without understanding it.

That, however, is only by the way. The fact is, of course, that the demand for a change in institutions is in itself the manifestation of changed human nature, human nature seeking to express itself in the conduct of national affairs. If it is a mistake to think of human nature without taking into account its selfishness, it is equally a mistake to think of human nature as having no other quality than

selfishness. Man is sociable by nature. Isolation is a discomfort to him, and solitary confinement one of the worst punishments you can inflict upon him. He seeks fellowship and a friendly intercourse with those about him. Kindliness, sympathy, affection ; these, as well as self-seeking, are facts in human nature. And even though self-seeking and self-preservation be the primary motives yet the presence of these other qualities means that the normal man, if he can serve himself either way, will prefer the way which does not bring him into unfriendly relations with other men. It is not normal human nature to choose the unfriendly way when the friendly way serves equally well. When, besides being unfriendly, it is also the ineffective way, its adoption is simply evidence of a standard of intelligence below the normal, of undeveloped human nature. And the indictment against private capitalism is its ineffectiveness ; an indictment not primarily on the ground of its being a selfish method of conducting affairs, but an indictment of its amazing stupidity and want of ordinary secular intelligence in the carrying on of the world's work. Ignoring all other qualities, assuming, as Ruskin puts it, that man not only has a skeleton but is all skeleton, that human nature is not only selfish, but selfish to the exclusion of every other quality, and that the sole prevailing motive with men is, and will remain, the attainment of security and comfort for themselves, the charge which Socialism makes against private capitalism is the charge of thwarting that attainment for the mass of mankind and making a grotesque muddle of its own business of self-seeking. Regarding society primarily as an organisation for serving the self-interest of each of its members, private capitalism is the most hopeless failure. From the point of view of human nature as it is, the problem of the production and distribution of wealth is a purely secular problem of efficiency, of intelligent choice of the best methods by which human self-interest can be served in the attainment of security and comfort. It is by that very test of serving what it asserts to be the requirements of a human nature essentially self-seeking that private capitalism stands condemned ; condemned, not primarily for its

moral short-comings, but for its incapacity, its want of intelligence, its stupid failure to bring security and comfort within the reach of men.

The accusation against private capitalism, therefore, is not its selfishness, but its stupidity and short-sightedness ; not that it is the expression of the self-interest of human nature, but that it is an unenlightened and fumbling method of serving that self-interest. There is nothing ignoble, nothing of moral degradation, in the pursuit of self-interest ; for self-interest, self-preservation, is the very law of life. The moral shortcomings of the race, the cruelties, the despicable injustices and meannesses, are merely ignorance, the want of a seeing eye and a capable brain. The law of life is self-interest and self-preservation, but self-interest and self-preservation intelligently pursued ; and the whole growth of civilization, of the establishment of human relationships between men, is the growth of an intelligent recognition of the fact that mutual aid and respect for the self-interest of others is the only stable foundation upon which the individual can attain to security and comfort ; that self-seeking defeats itself when it attempts to leave the friendly qualities of human nature out of account. Meanness, cruelty, tyranny in any form, seeking to secure one's self by hesting one's neighbour, pursuing personal gain at the expense of others, and every variety of theft and injustice,—these things stand condemned, not primarily as immoralities, but as inefficiencies and stupidities, as hindrances to the intelligent fulfilment of the law of life, the law of self-interest and self-preservation ; and therefore as immoralities, since morality is to see life steadily and see it whole.

To talk of altering industrial methods into Socialist forms, therefore, is not to suggest the eradication of self-seeking from human life, but the intelligent direction of that primary instinct ; such intelligent direction as comes about when men, seeing life steadily and seeing it whole, learn that the predatory pursuit of individual gain is a threat to the general human self-interest, and that good citizenship and the establishment of stable, reliable, honest relationships between men are in the end an infinitely

more powerful guarantee for each man's attainment of security and comfort than predatory methods can ever be. Hence good citizenship and the suppression of the predatory individual are not an abandonment of self-interest, but a more intelligent pursuit of it. A community consisting entirely of thieves, devoted wholly to the pursuit of predatory gain, would not be simply a moral failure but an economic failure. By attempting to serve each individual self-interest in that way, it would destroy the attainment of self-interest for everyone. The final word about it would be its folly, its abject stupidity, rather than *its* criminality.

In the sense, therefore, of altering human nature by cutting the motive of self-interest out of life Socialism makes no call for any such ridiculous and impossible de-vitalization of men. What it calls for is the abandonment of predatory ways of serving that self-interest, on the score of their doltish inefficiency. The alteration of human nature to which it looks forward is the alteration of greater enlightenment and a more comprehensive judgment in its methods of self-expression,—the more comprehensive judgment which is essentially civilization, the constant obsolescence of predatory methods in favour of social co-operation.

To suggest that you cannot alter human nature in this sense by altering the material conditions under which men live is the most shocking absurdity. Nobody, as can be easily demonstrated, really believes any such nonsense. There is action and reaction, of course, The higher intelligence of men, their altered nature as revealed in their desires, brings about changes in material conditions ; but those changes in material conditions operate in turn to produce the altered human nature which maintains the change when it is once brought about. It is largely, as we shall see in a moment, a question as between the adult and the child. Nobody, I repeat, really believes that altered material conditions do not alter character. The matter can be put to the simplest test. Would anyone who pretends to believe that human nature is unaffected by its material surroundings send his own child out from his

own home to live a slum life under the full influence of a slum environment? And if not, why not? The child would take its human nature with it into the slum, its human nature which "cannot be altered by material circumstances."—You see, nobody really believes it. We all know that these things do matter, that they make or mar character.

The mistake which people make in talking about human nature as the opponents of Socialism habitually talk about it, is the mistake of thinking of human nature exclusively in adult terms. It is partly, though by no means wholly, true that the hardened adult, warped into a predatory conduct of his life, is beyond hope. But people do not come into the world hardened adults. They come, plastic and impressionable, in the succession of fresh births with which nature constantly provides material for the renewal of the race. And if you wish to know what human nature is, you must look there; to the child and to the response which the child makes to the formative influences in which its life is set; to the child properly nourished, properly developed, growing in a wholesome atmosphere.

It is easy enough to condemn the wastrel or the predatory person who lives by dishonesty or injustice of any sort, when you see him in his hardened maturity; easy enough to pretend to define human nature by his way of life, and so to write down any change as impossible. But to understand the predatory person in his relation to human nature, it is necessary to look not only at the predatory person of to-day but at the predatory person of thirty years hence. You will find him in his cradle, in the swarming child life of our slums, in the squalid streets of our great industrial centres; good human material being spoilt in the making under our very eyes. Associated from the moment of birth, with those who have passed through the same process of demoralization before him, learning to lisp in coarse language, soaked in the atmosphere of wastrelism from the very start, all his experiences being of the tricks and beggaries and devices of the under-world, is it any wonder that he becomes shaped and subdued to the way

of life which all his formative influences force upon him ? Thirty years hence the child life which is now passing through this process of being shaped to mean ends, will be the wastrel population which respectable society will condemn and punish for its predatory way of living. And what is true of the thief and the wastrel is equally true of the predatory commercial and proprietor class. The men who will live by exploiting industry thirty years hence are growing up in homes where all that way of living is taken for granted, educated in its precepts and its customary ideas of making enterprising raids upon the world's resources, steeped from infancy in the predatory philosophy of life ; and the defenders of the existing order thirty years hence will point to their activities as evidence that human nature is essentially predatory, and that we are dreaming idle dreams if we hope to establish a decent social order with such human nature as that for our material.

It will be what we are making it ; thief or sweater, prostitute or financier, wastrel or landowner. You might as well plant roses under a north wall in a bed of sand, and then when June comes declare that the nature of roses is to be withered sticks, and that their alleged capacity for bearing beautiful flowers only exists in the imagination of Utopian gardeners. Nobody, I repeat, really believes that changed material conditions do not affect human conduct, or that evil communications do not corrupt good manners.

The " human nature " objection to Socialism is often put in pseudo-scientific terms, and evolution is called in to bear witness against economic change ! The notion of calling in the idea of evolution to demonstrate the fixity of economic forms is one of the humours of capitalist apologetics. The reader will be familiar with the argument generally used in this connection. It is an argument which consists in the misuse of the phrase, " survival of the fittest," and the total misapprehension of the evolutionary process which that phrase describes. Socialism, we are told, has the law of the survival of the fittest against it, inasmuch as Socialism seeks to protect the weaker individual from

the dominance and mastery of the stronger; and the dominance and mastery of the stronger is the law of life, the law of the struggle for existence.

Indeed, it is nothing of the kind. If it were, then not Socialism only but all human civilization would be an impossibility in face of such a natural law. For civilization has already contrived, with a fair degree of success, to prevent the pre-eminent individual from using his pre-eminent fist to encroach upon the rights of others, and is not likely to stop short of preventing him from using his pre-eminent cunning also to the like end; and civilization, by the very fact that it exists, is no violation of any natural law.

Socialism can very fairly retort upon those of its opponents who use the argument as to survival of the fittest as a justification for superior greed or strength or cunning being allowed to shape social institutions for its own benefit, that it is they who leave human nature out of account. If an Archdeacon and a gadfly went to live together in an undrained swamp, the Archdeacon would die and the gadfly would live; and that would be survival of the fittest in the strict scientific sense, the survival of the organism best adapted to the environment. But if the swamp were drained and its atmosphere made wholesome, the Archdeacon would live and the gadfly would die, and that too would be survival of the fittest in the strict scientific sense, the survival of the organism best adapted to the environment. And the Archdeacon would see to it, before he went to live there, that it *was* drained and wholesome and humanly habitable. Human nature, in this matter of the *survival* of the fittest, means the power of intelligent choice as to what is the fittest, and of altering the environment so as to suit that choice. It is that fact in human nature in its relation to the law of the survival of the fittest that is left out of account by those who speak of the struggle for existence as an impassable barrier to the realization of ideals.

When human intelligence, the quality hidden away in the central heart of the humblest amœbic form of life, and arrived at after infinite unfoldings and long ages of development, when human intelligence arrives, the

survival of the fittest proceeds along new lines. A new element enters into it. Itself the product of Nature, this new element turns round upon Nature, and sets up a new law of intelligent choice as the dominant factor in its own further evolution. Natural selection by the survival of the fittest passes in large measure under the direction and control of human choice and human desires. There must be adaptation to environment ; but while natural selection, in all the range of life before human nature appeared upon the scene, brings that adaptation about by killing off the life which is not adjusted to the environment, human nature brings it about by altering the environment which is not adjusted to the kind of life we desire should survive. That is the essential quality of human nature, the quality of intelligent choice and directing control. In natural selection, the outside conditions prevail and settle what the kind of life shall be ; in human selection, man's desire for this or that kind of life prevails and settles what the conditions shall be. Human intelligence can begin by choosing the kind of life which it believes to be desirable, and go on to modify the environment so as to make it favourable for the development of that kind of life ; and so the process of evolution in human affairs becomes more and more a conscious and a rational process, guided by intelligence and working deliberately towards ends dictated by human desire. Man, like the brute, cannot get outside the range of the great natural laws upon which the existence of life depends. The survival of the fittest, the law which demands, under penalty of death, adjustment between life and life's material environment, governs him as inexorably as it governs the brute. But he can fulfil the law by shaping circumstances to his desire. He is under no compulsion to sacrifice his ideals ; when he finds that the setting of his life hinders his development and the accomplishment of his desires he can create a new setting that will help him to his desire.

And so we come back to the old point. The fact that self-seeking is a predominant quality in human nature is no evidence whatever for the continuance of predatory economic forms of human activity. Such an assumption

leaves human intelligence out of account ; for human intelligence has discovered—the history of civilization is the record of the development of the discovery—that predatory individualism defeats its own purpose in the long run, and makes self-seeking, self-realization, the attainment of desirable things, insecure for everyone. To talk about human nature, and to leave out of account this supreme quality of intelligence in self-seeking, the quality which has made such degree of real civilization as we have, and in which lies the hope of any enlargement of that civilization, the quality of the mind's eye in men, rudimentary as it may be as yet, is to leave out of account the determining factor in the whole thing. The "fittest" man for effective human self-seeking and self-realization is the man clear-sighted enough to know that the conditions essential to self-seeking are conditions of social order and security, and that the best guarantee of individual welfare is general human welfare.

In this region of social relationship it is not true to say of individuals that the desire for goodness can, as the late Bishop of Norwich put it, work its own blessed way into realization. The notion that the world can be saved from injustice and predatory ways of life by individual goodness, that if each man does his best to live uprightly in his personal relationships with his fellows all will be well, breaks down upon examination. The relationships between men are social rather than individual relationships; and however much the individual may desire goodness he is governed by the conditions of the collective life in his dealings with his fellows. His dealings with his fellows are only to an infinitesimal degree direct personal dealings. Within that degree he may practise what he preaches ; may be honourable, truthful, just, and loving. But all that is only a drop in the ocean of his vast impersonal and indirect relationship with his fellow men.

Every moment of his existence there are services coming into his life from multitudes of men, all the world over, whom he has never seen and with whom he will never come into direct personal contact ; and the conditions of this relationship are not under his individual control at all.

When the Bishop eats bread, he receives service from agricultural labourers whose children die in a certain proportion every year from ailments brought about by living in an under-nourished condition in overcrowded and insanitary cottages. Our present private capitalist methods of providing the food supply of the nation only allow to the labourer a cramped life ; and every man who eats bread, be he Bishop or tramp, participates in the responsibility for that injustice. Every year the pottery industry condemns a number of young girls to blindness and wrist-drop, and the horrible physical consequences of lead poisoning and potter's rot. By the industrial process of which this is a constant feature we get our supply of crockery. It is one of the services which come into the Bishop's life and mine. And the Bishop shares with the rest of us the responsibility for it. We are employing weavers and spinners, miners and iron-workers, seamen bringing us goods from the ends of the earth, myriads of workers all putting their lives into services which come finally into our lives. Our convenience and comfort are built up by these services, built up of the lives of men, ministered to by agencies which finally include all our fellows. We are, in a living and organic sense, members one with another. And whatever injustice there may be in this living system of social relationship is all our shame and all our responsibility. The best of us is compelled to participate in sweating and murder and injustice every day. There is no individual escape out of it into personal righteousness. Only a social redemption can free the individual.

In this vast network and entanglement of our indirect dealings with men, individual goodness cannot work its blessed way into realization. Does the fact that the Bishop is a good man work its own blessed way in making his relationship just and good with the labourers who are growing wheat for him, with the steel-workers whose average of life is shortened twenty years below the normal in order that he and the rest of us may have cutlery, with the spinners and weavers whose children die before completing their first year at a rate more than double the infantile death-rate amongst the well-to-do because of the

conditions under which the Bishop and I get our cotton and woollen goods ? It is an evasion of responsibility to talk of personal righteousness under such conditions. The Bishop is up to the eyes with the rest of us in all this poison and murder and infliction of disease ; and can only get out of it by social action against the institutions and methods of industrial organisation which have such consequences.

Good people who talk as the Bishop talks about personal goodness mistake the nature of the problem. They talk as though it were a matter of mitigating the sorrows and troubles of other people. It is that, truly ; but it is also more than that. It is not only a matter of removing the impediments which hinder other men from living the life they ought to live, but of removing the impediments which hinder the Bishop himself from living the life he ought to live. The fact of a social responsibility in which he shares does not seem to have occurred to the Bishop. He is so concerned about putting the duty of personal goodness to men that he overlooks the fact that he, like the rest of us, is governed by the collective life, and is compelled to live wickedly and unjustly towards his fellows in those social and industrial relationships which are outside his own personal control and beyond the range of his individual righteousness.

The "human nature" argument against Socialism, the suggestion that, men being as they are, they will continue to pursue their self-interests by predatory and unjust means rather than by intelligent co-operation and mutual aid, is, as we have seen, not so much a reflection upon their character as upon their power of judgment. Incidentally, it may be noted that if the argument be valid against Socialism, it is equally valid against the appeal which religion makes for individual righteousness. For it is from the same force of human motive and human nature that personal conduct and civic conduct alike have their direction ; and if human nature is a denial of the possibility of superseding unintelligent predatory methods by fair dealing in national and industrial life, it is equally a denial of the same possibility in individual life. The corollary to this particular

attack upon Socialism would therefore seem to be the shutting up of all the churches and the abandonment of all work for inducing the individual to live honestly with his neighbours. For if his human nature permits him to live honestly in his direct personal dealings with his neighbours, clearly it cannot be an insurmountable obstacle to his co-operation with his neighbours for putting their national affairs upon a similar footing. The nation, like the individual, can set its house in order as soon as it chooses.

Ah yes, you say, there is the crux of the whole question. "As soon as it chooses." But men are selfish and unjust, and will not choose. And so we get back to the old story that if you put a pig into a drawing-room he will make a sty of it.

Very well, then. If men will not so choose, they will not; and there is an end of the matter. Socialism does not propose to impose a new social organisation upon the nation against the nation's own will and choice. The ridiculous idea that such changes can be made over the head of the nation is mere midsummer madness. What Socialists are doing is to preach to the nation their idea of a new social order, and to ask the nation of its own will and choice to clear out its own pig-sty and live decently. If the anti-Socialist estimate of human nature as an essentially predatory thing is correct, then of course the nation will not listen to Socialism. The change must come, if it comes at all, as the expression and fulfilment of the national desire; and we must wait for it until we have a nation intelligent enough to see the ineffectiveness of the predatory method of self-seeking. The nation will live by its own choice. There can be no putting of pigs into drawing-rooms against their own choice. But, on the other hand, neither can there be any keeping of intelligent men and women in pig-sties against their own choice. The argument about human nature being too piggish and predatory for Socialism is not, therefore, an argument against Socialism at all; it is only a speculative opinion as to the likelihood of Socialism coming about. And that is a matter of opinion which can only be settled by the event, and tested in the

meantime by the strength and insistence of the demand for Socialism. If the nation does not want Socialism, it will not establish Socialism.

There is no other possible test of the fitness or otherwise of human nature for changed conditions of life than the strength and persistence of the demand for those changed conditions. Such a demand *is* human nature revealing itself in action. A theory of human nature which sets up human nature itself as the barrier to human desire is reduced to absurdity by the very revelation of human nature which that desire makes. There can be no other knowledge of what human nature is than by what human nature insistently demands.

And I put it to you that your own choice for or against Socialism is one of the factors in that revelation of what human nature is in this matter ; and that when you oppose Socialism, as many people affect to oppose it, on the ground that human nature is too predatory for it, your own human nature is included in that indictment according to the side you take. If you are on the side of the pigs—the elegant metaphor is not mine, it is the common anti-Socialist metaphor for human nature—by all means say so and vote so and help to make the national decision so. But to vote for the pig-sty because you believe that other people are piggish is surely the queerest irrelevant reason that could be imagined for opposing Socialism. One's duty as a citizen is to vote for or against Socialism on its merits. The question for you, in the exercise of your duty as a citizen, is not whether other people's human nature is predatory or not, but whether your own is. And if your own desire is for just institutions, the fact that there may be other people with predatory desires, so far from being any reason why you should throw your electoral weight into their scale, is the strongest possible reason for adding your unit to the force against them, the force whose growth and electoral expression is evidence of the falsity of their claim to represent human nature.

The whole of this anti-Socialist talk about human nature stands exposed, therefore, as irrelevant to the real issue. Either Socialism is a just idea or it is not. Either you

believe in it or you do not. If you do not, your belief in a predatory human nature, while it may give you greater confidence in fighting Socialism (though why you should trouble to fight a thing which you believe to be not only undesirable but impossible is a mystery to me) cannot add anything to your case against it on its merits. And if you do believe in its justice, your estimate of human nature, while it may make you despondent about the prospect of any immediate attainment, cannot modify in the slightest degree your conviction of its justice. These theories of human nature are only speculative opinions about the chances, and not about the merits, of Socialism ; and it is the business of honest men in politics to go on and take the chances so long as they are assured about the merits.

For my part, I know no more hopeful sign of its chances than the desperation of its opponents to proclaim it impossible rather than to argue it undesirable. If they really believed that, I do not think they would be quite so troubled about it.

CHAPTER X.

ON BEING PRACTICAL.

To any wide-minded man, capable of taking a clear-sighted survey of the movement of the world's thought, it is obvious enough that the time has gone by for political aims and purposes in social work which take for granted the continued existence of squalid lives; that out and beyond the little peddling futilities of party politics the newer social movements are questioning the whole class foundation of human society. But the average party politician is incapable of any such survey; and his answer to the case here presented is merely to dismiss it with a wave of the hand as impractical. He has, he will tell you, no patience with theories and sentiments and general principles; he stands for common sense and concentration upon the detailed work of the moment.

It only remains, in conclusion, to say a word or two upon this matter of being practical in politics; to take up the challenge of the ordinary hack politician upon it, and to retort upon him with demonstration that the quality of idealism in political propaganda is the one quality above all others which makes it a practical propaganda.

For what, precisely, does he mean by being practical? . . . Suppose I fell ill, and called in a medical man to treat me. "Aha," says he, "don't trouble to describe your general symptoms to me. Let us stick to the obvious practical details immediately before us. Here is a pimple on your nose. I will anoint that and bandage it, and when we have disposed of that we will go on to consider the next detail." Would you be surprised if I fired the man out,

and called in a practitioner whose treatment would be based on diagnosis and would aim at my condition as a whole ?

That is exactly what the hack party politician means by being practical. His idea is that we must approach the problem of poverty from the point of view of dealing separately with each pimple. He calls that bringing a practical mind to bear on the detail of the moment. If you suggest to him that all these details,—bad housing, low wages, underfed children, unemployed men, women on the streets for a living, commercial crises, the corrupt luxury of the plutocracy, the squalor and ignorance of the poor, and all the rest of the horrible tangle of modern life,—are not separate problems at all, but only symptoms of some fundamental disorder in our social system ; and that until we begin to treat that disorder at its source, and approach the whole social problem with a definite purpose in our minds with regard to it, we shall accomplish nothing worth mentioning ; if you suggest anything of that sort to him, then you are a visionary and an impractical person, a dealer in theories and generalizations.

What has to be asserted with all emphasis is that the only practical person is the dealer in theories and generalizations. That is true not only in politics ; it is the abiding law of human efficiency in every department of thought and action. It is the fundamental distinction between scientific practice and quackery. In medicine, it is impossible to treat individual cases of sickness efficiently without having a coherent body of medical science at your back. No real work is done in any department of the world's activities without a science which goes beyond details. What would you think of an engineer who boasted that he knew nothing of the first principles of engineering, and carried on his business by dealing with details as they arise ? And so it is all round. The practical man is the man who understands the science of his work, the man who has a thorough knowledge of the principles which he applies in practice. We are all quacks, ignorant fumlbers, blind and incompetent persons, until we get a coherent purpose into our actions.

And so it is in politics, just as assuredly as in medicine,

in engineering, in navigation, in farming, or in any other occupation. Here, in a supreme degree, considering the issues of human life staked upon the intelligence of our action, the need for comprehensive surveys and first principles holds good. You cannot be an efficient and practical person in politics unless you have a body of political philosophy behind your dealing with detail. You must know in a scientific way the subject with which you are dealing. And the critics of Socialism who complain of its tendency to talk of the detail of the moment in terms of theory and first principles, are paying Socialism the high compliment of proclaiming that it handles the problem of poverty in a scientific way. Their criticism is precisely the same as that which a Hottentot medicine man would pass upon the work of the Royal College of Physicians ; the perennial criticism of the quack upon the scientist. It is the same criticism with which the bucolic farmer of the old school resents the intrusion of scientific knowledge and scientific methods into agriculture. He is a practical man, he will tell you, and he does not agree with all this new-fangled nonsense about scientific study and a parcel of college professors fancying they can teach him anything.

What party politicians mean by being "practical" is that they do not realize the need for an Order of Things in what they are doing. Take them, for example, in the department of public work in which I happen to see most of them, the department of municipal administration. How many of them have the slightest purpose in their work ? How many of them have the least idea that municipal administration means anything more than going on to the next item on the agenda ? How many of them would understand what you were getting at if you asked them what they think they are doing with the life of their city ? The very fact of your asking them any such preposterous question would be final evidence to them that you are an unbalanced and impractical person. . . . It is no exaggeration to say that nine people out of ten engaged in English public life to-day not only have no notion whatever of an Order of Things in what they are

doing, but regard the very notion of working to a set purpose, of putting an ordered system of thought and a coherent body of principles into their work, as a visionary and impossible thing. They are still in the Central African medicine man stage of development so far as any idea of science in their work is concerned ; and not only have no guiding principles, but are proud of not having any, and base their definition of what is practical politics on the fact of not having any.

That is the frame of mind of those who complain of the impracticability of Socialism. Against it, our business is to insist constantly upon the need for definite aims and constructive purposes. Here we are, face to face with a condition of things in human life which violates the instinct of every reasonable man for orderly ways of doing our work. Human life in modern capitalist society presents the same sort of spectacle as a city just shaken by earthquake. Human lives lie about us in the same chaos and confusion as the ruins in an earthquake district ; lives stunted and ignorant, lives squalid and vicious, lives pompous and pretentious ; children underfed, mothers unable to nourish themselves for motherhood, unemployed men taking to crime, women taking to prostitution, a constant daily record of suicides ; everywhere bewilderment and confusion, a welter of harassed and aimless lives ; nowhere a decent human organisation of the world's resources for the benefit of the world's people. . . . And the practical man, according to the current interpretation of what is practical, is he who takes the essential fact of all this confusion for granted as the permanent dispensation of things ; while the impractical person, the visionary Utopian, is he who proclaims the possibility of clearing up the confusion. Nothing could be more comical, even though it has the tragedy of human deprivation for its setting and framework, than the claim of our little breed of party politicians to be practical folk on the ground of their having no ideal beyond grubbing along in the midst of the muddle. It is like calling an architect a Utopian because he troubles himself with plans, and contending that the best way to build a house is to fool about with the immediate brick of

the moment here and the immediate brick there at hazard, without any general plan or purpose in placing them, and without any idea of whether a palace or a pig-sty is to come of it. What does actually come of it is hardly even so orderly a thing as a pig-sty, but only the fortuitous derangement of a lumber heap.

Until we become idealists and Utopians we cannot be effective or practical people. Until we become capable, in our thought and action upon human affairs, of looking beyond details and seeing life as a whole in the light of some orderly conception of what organised human action might make of it, our politics will be a mere groping in darkness and our work for social improvement a futility. Where there is no vision the people perish. And the so-called practical politician has no vision, no aim, no knowledge of where he is going or what he is trying to do. Face to face with this problem of poverty, all that he can do, with his lack of constructive purpose, is to relieve in scanty and grudging fashion the most urgent cases of need,—or rather the most importunate, for one only hears of many of the most urgent cases when they come to a coroner's enquiry. Social reconstruction, any dealing with the evil at its source, any reference, even, to its source, he regards as being outside practical politics. His notion of government and administration is simply that we should go on for ever and for ever struggling with the details of a social chaos directly resulting from our failure to grasp the economic position as a whole and put it upon a right footing; constantly mopping up the floor while leaving the tap turned on. That is why government and administration seem to him to be such an immensely complicated, difficult, and fruitless business; and no doubt it is a complicated, difficult, and fruitless business so long as we go on consenting to the superstition that instead of regulating our affairs on a footing of justice, all we can do is to wallow incessantly in the muddle which results from our *not* so regulating them. What with the cut-throat battle for individual wealth amongst the commercial class and the desperation of want and hunger among the disinherited, there is a constant frenzy of evil passion, of greed and envy,

of crime and anti-social conduct, of devising every sort of ingenious dodge to best one's neighbour or get one's rival underfoot. To keep this, as Edward Bellamy puts it, from resolving itself into general massacre and destruction, a vast machinery of police, soldiery, judges, prisons, work-houses, soup kitchens, charities, hospitals, churches, and law-making has to be kept going; and the administration of all these restraining agencies is what the ordinary politician means by "practical politics,"—merely struggling, I repeat, with the social chaos which results from our not being practical enough to put the whole thing on a footing of justice to begin with.

The truly practical business of politics is outside and beyond all this. It is the business of social reconstruction, the business of dealing with the evil at its source; the practical work of realizing the vision and the ideal of what sane men might make of their national life. So far from meaning neglect of the detail of the moment, it means putting into the detail of the moment the greater energy which comes of having a clearly seen purpose in it. To set comprehensive thinking and carefulness in detail in antagonism to each other, as the "practical" person does, is to rob life of its effectiveness. It is a favourite device of his to represent a frankly revolutionary aim as impossibilism, as looking forward to some great day of Armageddon when the foundations of society will be shaken and a new order inaugurated in catastrophic fashion, involving in the meantime the adoption of disorderly tactics in place of orderly political change. The humour of the thing is increased by the fact that one finds an occasional Socialist anxious apparently to acquire a reputation for political sagacity by the British shopkeeper standard, solemnly disavowing revolutionary purposes for the sake of placating these absurd persons. Nothing is gained by attempting to get round the vulgar in that way. They are not in the least likely to be placated; and the mob of propertied persons with vested interests in unwholesomeness and injustice will resent revolutionary aims just as vehemently when they are presented in non-revolutionary terms as when they are presented as truculently as the most

embittered victim of class injustice can put them. What social revolution means is neither Armageddon nor the mere shouting of impossibilist formulae in politics. It means a purpose of fundamental change as against the mere purpose of patching up within the existing order. The change from individual ownership and production for private profit to collective ownership and the co-operative commonwealth is such a purpose ; and if the detailed work of Socialists in Parliament or in the municipalities is to be effective, there must be a steady insistence upon its essentially revolutionary nature. So far from meaning impossibilism or assuming that the walls of Jericho will fall down if only the blast of trumpets is strident and loud enough, it means a steady devotion to the work lying immediately to our hand, the conquest of political power and the steady constructive work of legislation ; but with a clear sense of direction in that immediate work. The ordinary politician glories in short-sightedness, in thinking about nothing but the next step. Socialists are just as keen about the next step as the ordinary politician is ; what they resent is the ordinary politician's fatuous superstition that the next step is in itself a political policy, without reference to the journey of which it is a step. We must, if we are to be practical people, see and proclaim our destination as well as our next step, must know where we are going, and always, in taking the next step, however small it may be, make sure that it is in the direction of our destination. It is the purpose beyond the detail of the moment which alone makes the detail of the moment intelligent and effective.

What we may call the religious quality in present-day politics is this deliberate consciousness in men's minds of profound organic change in the order of things, and the handling of the detail of the moment with an intelligent understanding of what that change implies in human relationships and economic institutions. It is that quality which gives to Socialism its clarion call to the people and its inspiration for the detailed daily duties of political activity. We do not come into politics as a third party in the ordinary sense of desiring to take our share in the carrying on of the existing social order. We do not acquiesce

in the existing social order. We come in as revolutionists, with the revolutionary purpose of substituting collective for individual ownership of the means of work as the principle of national and social organisation. And when a principle of social organisation stands condemned, as private capitalism stands condemned, as dangerous and unfit for human habitation, the practical man is not he who confines himself to pottering about aimlessly amongst the ruins, dabbing bits of futile putty into the crazy walls, but he who moves out and sets himself to the work of reconstruction on a sounder plan.

Upon one other aspect of the delusion under which the ordinary politician suffers as to what is "practical" in politics I have already touched briefly in the last chapter. It is becoming one of the rooted superstitions of English politics that things can only be done slowly and by very gradual stages. I could understand an earnest man coming regretfully to the conclusion that, in the then condition of the public mind about it, only a slow and partial movement towards reform is possible for the moment. But the superstition in modern politics is something quite different from that. It is not merely a regretful recognition of the inopportunity of whole-hearted action at some given moment of public apathy. It is, on the contrary, a positive gospel of slowness, a worship of doing things very gradually as the best of all possible ways of doing them. But if you examine this gospel closely, you will find that it is invariably based, not upon a recognition of difficulties in the way of desired reform, but upon hostility to the reforms themselves. The politician who talks about a reform being a long way ahead is never very desirous of its being any nearer. Talk of that sort generally comes from those who are against the reform anyhow, and would be as much against it at any future time as they are now. I appeal especially to our younger people in politics never to consent to the enervating and cramping superstition that you must go slowly. It is a false view of life and of its possibilities, put forward by those who desire no change, who profit by the existing order, and hope to delay and delay justice to the uttermost ; a false view of how

human life develops and how changes in human society are brought about.

When you speak of a political movement being ahead of its time, do you think that things move of themselves, and that we must sit down helplessly and wait till they are ready? Believe me, political events are not a mechanical procession of things, like the dates in a calendar, for which we have to wait until they come round. Political events are the expression of the living will of living men in the ordering of their affairs. They have no existence in themselves outside the human will of which they are the expression. The idea of a new social order is only ahead of its time so long as men do not desire to establish it. What is meant by the time being ripe is that men do desire it. It rests with you. The question is: Is it a just and a right thing? If it is just and right, it does not belong only to the centuries ahead. It belongs to us, here and now, as soon as we make up our minds to it. Why should we think it possible for the men of two hundred or a thousand years hence to live justly, and impossible for us? If it will be possible for them, it will only be because they desire it and will it and accomplish it. And if we desire it, we can will it and accomplish it as well as they. Time is not of the essence of the matter at all, except in so far as men's desires grow in time. When the desire is here the time is here. Faith and courage will do it at any time. What we really say when we talk of Socialism being before its time is, "Yes, we desire a just social order, but for our part we are weak and cowardly; we leave it to the men of to-morrow, men of a larger courage and a more intrepid faith than ours." There is never any to-morrow for a race in whom such a mood prevails.

Socialism claims that faith and courage for to-day; faith in our human powers against any old traditional order of things, against any injustice, however venerable or consecrated by generations of respectability; and courage to make our politics rise to the height of our desire for justice. What we need in politics to-day is the larger vision, the audacious hope, the belief in our human lordship and mastery over the course of events just as soon as we

choose to direct and control them ; the refusal to acquiesce in any known injustice, or to waste our days in sacrificing the logic of revolutionary completeness to any fear of demanding too much or moving too quickly ; the consciousness of a great mission and faith in its fulfilment, dwelling constantly with our highest purposes, our vision of the nation as we desire to see it, and pledging ourselves to humanity for the successful issue of our struggle for justice. By approaching politics in that spirit, the spirit of idealism and of purpose, we shall give a far greater strength of practical application to the detailed work of the moment than can ever be got into the uninspired drudgery, the groping in the dark, of the man who sets out to be practical by despising ideals, the man who has no vision to realize.

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